



The
RED CROSS GIRLS
with
PERSHING to VICTORY
MARGARET VANDERCOOK

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THE RED CROSS GIRLS WITH PERSHING TO VICTORY



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The Red Cross Girls With Pershing to Victory

By

MARGARET VANDERCOOK

Author of "The Ranch Girls Series," "Stories
about Camp Fire Girls Series," etc.

Illustrated

The John C. Winston Company
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THE RED CROSS GIRLS WITH PERSHING TO VICTORY

CHAPTER I

With The American Army in France

IT was a bright winter day near the middle of November, the ground hard with frost and light flurries of snow in the air.

Over the sloping French countryside thousands of brown tents arose like innumerable, giant anthills, while curling above certain portions of the camp were long columns of smoke. American soldiers were walking about in a leisurely fashion, or standing in groups talking. Some of them were engaged in cleaning their guns or other military accoutrements, a number were investigating their kits.

Near one of the camp fires a private was singing to the accompaniment of a guitar and a banjo played by two other soldiers, with a fairly large crowd surrounding them. "Johnny get your gun, we've the Hun on the run."

Over the entire American camp there was an atmosphere of relaxation, of cheerfulness, of duty accomplished. The eleventh of November having passed, with the armistice signed, the American soldiers in France were now awaiting orders either to return home to the United States or else to march toward the Rhine. In this particular neighborhood of Château-Thierry no word had yet been received as to what units were to form a part of the American Army of Occupation, only the information that the units were to be chosen with regard to their military accomplishments since their arrival in France.

Therefore the heroes of Château-Thierry and of Belleau Woods, of St. Mihiel and the Argonne Forest were ready to accept whatever fate sent, "Home," or "The Watch on the Rhine."

Finally ending his song the singer stood up; he was wearing the uniform of the United States Marines.

"I say don't stop singing, Navara. What's a fellow to do these days without your music, when we have no longer the noise of the cannon or the shrieking of guns overhead as a substitute?" one of the group of soldiers exclaimed. "The quiet has come so suddenly it is almost as hard to grow accustomed to it, as it once was to the infernal racket."

"Oh, Navara is expecting visitors, feminine visitors. Some people have all the luck!" Corporal Donald Hackett protested, placing his banjo in its case and also rising. He spoke with a slight southern drawl and was a tall, fair young fellow with brilliant blue eyes, and both his hair and skin burned red by exposure to the outdoors.

"Come along then and be introduced to my friends; a good many of you fellows know them already," Carlo Navara answered. "Mrs. David Clark and six Red Cross nurses are motoring over from the Red Cross hospital. I suppose you have been told that sometime this afternoon half a dozen of our men are to be cited. An officer is coming from headquarters to represent the commander in chief, and present the medals. In a short time we must be ready for inspection."

Moving off together the two men formed an interesting contrast.

Carlo Navara was dark, a little below medium height, with closely cut brown hair, rather extraordinary black eyes and an olive skin.

The young singer, an American of Italian ancestry, had first fought among the snow-clad hills of Italy. Wounded, he had afterwards returned to the United States, where a great career as a singer was opening before him. Then the desire to fight in France had driven him to surrender his art and to serve as a volunteer in the marine corps.

A moment later the two men disappeared within their tents. An automobile with the Red Cross insignia soon after drove up before one of the entrances to the camp where a sentry stood guard.

Stepping out of it first came a woman, youthful of face and form, but whose hair was nearly white, her eyes a deep blue with dark lashes, and her color a bright crimson from her drive through the winter air.

Following her immediately was a young girl, scarcely eighteen years old, who was small and fair with pale blonde hair and surprisingly dark brown eyes. Both the woman and girl were wearing heavy fur coats and small hats fitting close down over their hair.

The older woman was Mrs. David Clark, the wife of the chief surgeon of the Red Cross hospital which was situated a few miles from the present camp. Before her marriage which had taken place only a little more than six months before, she had been Sonya Valesky.

The young girl was her ward, Bianca Zoli.

"I declare, Sonya, I don't see how you always manage to get ahead of the rest of us considering your advanced years," another girl exclaimed, jumping out of the car and slipping on the icy ground until her older friend caught firm hold of her.

"Do be careful, Nona Davis, and don't be humorous until you are more sure of your footing," Sonya Clark replied. "You know when you return to New York I want Captain Martin to find you as well as when you said goodbye to him. But have you Dr. Clark's note to the officer of the day? I'll ask the sentry to take it in to him."

During the few moments Mrs. Clark and Nona Davis were talking, four other Red Cross nurses had followed their example and were out of the automobile. They were now walking up and down on the frozen road for warmth and exercise.

They were Mildred Thornton and her sister-in-law, Barbara Thornton, who had been doing Red Cross nursing in nearly every one of the allied countries since the outbreak of the great war.

The other two girls had been nursing in France only for the past year.

One of them, Ruth Carroll, was taller than any of her companions and strongly built, with dusky hair and grey eyes set wide apart. Her companion was tiny, with bright red hair, rather nondescript features and a few freckles, in spite of the season of the year, upon her upturned nose. Yet Theodosia Thompson, with her full red lips, her small, even white teeth and her

dancing light blue eyes under a fringe of reddish brown lashes, was by no means plain.

"Aren't you praying every moment, Ruth, that we may be ordered forward with the army of occupation into Germany? Personally I shall not be happy until I see with my own eyes the Germans actually tasting the bitterness of defeat. I made a vow to myself that I would not go back home until General Pershing had led our troops to victory, and a real victory means the stars and stripes floating over a portion of the German country."

The older and larger of the two American girls smiled a slow, gentle smile characteristic of her personality and in sharp contrast with her companion's impetuous speech and action.

Both girls were Kentuckians and had been friends for years before sailing to do Red Cross work in France.

"Well, I have never been so fierce a character as you, Thea! To me victory will seem assured the day peace is signed. Yet if any of the divisions of soldiers among whom we have been nursing are ordered to Germany, certainly I hope our Red Cross unit may accompany them. I presume not nearly so many nurses will be needed as in the fighting days, however."

In the interval, while this conversation was taking place, Mrs. Clark's note had been dispatched to the officer of the day. At this moment Major Hersey appeared.

Major James Hersey, confidentially known among his battalion as "Jimmie" had the distinction of being one of the youngest majors in the United States army, and to his own regret was not only less than twenty-five years old but looked even younger.

"I am so awfully glad to see you, Mrs. Clark," he began, blushing furiously without apparent reason, as he spoke, which was an uncomfortable habit.

"I want you to congratulate me. We have just had a telephone message from headquarters saying that we are to form a part of the first big unit of the American army occupational force. We are to begin to move toward Germany at half past five o'clock Sunday morning, and I am tremendously

pleased. Our orders are to march two days and rest three and our troops will move on a front of fifty miles for two weeks when we expect to reach the Rhine. But forgive my enthusiasm, Mrs. Clark. You are the first person to whom I have told the good news. Even the men don't know yet. You'll say hurrah with me." Major Hersey ended boyishly, forgetting military etiquette in his enthusiasm. He had a round, youthful face, curly light brown hair and eyes of nearly the same shade.

Later, when Sonya had offered her congratulations, insisting, however, that she was not surprised by the news if military accomplishment had been considered, she and Major Hersey led the way into the American camp in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry followed by the six American girls.

Half an hour afterwards the same information had been disseminated throughout the camp. Lieutenant-Colonel Townsend had also arrived to award the citations and the Distinguished Service Crosses to the officers and soldiers who had merited the distinction.

Never were Sonya Clark and the six Red Cross nurses to forget this, their last picture of an American camp in France before the great movement of the victorious army toward the Rhine.

The clouds of the earlier afternoon had grown heavier and more snow was falling in larger flakes, so that the earth was covered with a thin white carpet.

A cold wind was blowing across the winter fields.

The American soldiers stood in long, even lines, erect, rugged and efficient.

Sonya and her group of Red Cross nurses managed to protect themselves a little from the cold by standing behind a group of officers and near one of the officer's tents, not far from Lieutenant-Colonel Townsend and Major Hersey. They were the only women in the camp at the present time.

Therefore the only feminine applause emanated from them when the first young officer came forward to receive his citation from the hands of the Commanding Officer.

First Lieutenant Leon De Funiak was a young French officer who had been attached to a division of the United States Marines.

In the name of the President he was presented with the Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism in action near St. Mihiel on September 12 when with excellent courage he had captured a machine gun which he turned upon an adjoining trench forcing the enemy occupants to surrender.

The second award was made to Corporal Donald Hackett, a friend of Carlo Navara's and an acquaintance of the Red Cross girls. Later, two citations were given to privates with whom they had no acquaintance.

The afternoon sun was disappearing and the wind growing colder.

Bianca Zoli, who stood between her guardian and Nona Davis, shivered.

Unconscious of what she was doing she also gave a little sigh due to fatigue and cold. Younger than her companions she was also more fragile in appearance.

Her guardian now turned toward her.

"I am sorry, Bianca, you are worn out. I am afraid you should not have come with us. Yet it is impossible to leave now until the citations are over."

At this same moment, another name was being announced by the Commanding Officer. Instantly Bianca Zoli's manner and appearance changed. Her cheeks became a warm crimson, her dark eyes glowed, her lips even trembled slightly although she held the lower one firm with her small white teeth.

The name called was Private Carlo Navara. The Distinguished Service Cross was his award. Early in the previous July he had crossed as a spy into the enemy's lines and there secured information which had proved of extraordinary value to the commander in chief of the allied armies.

Half an hour later, returning to the Red Cross hospital, which lay a few miles behind the American camp, Bianca Zoli sat wrapped in a rug for further warmth, yet her expression had continued radiant. With her pale fair hair blowing from underneath her fur cap, her eyes deep and dark and

happy underneath a little fringe of snow which had fallen and clung to her long lashes, she looked oddly pretty.

"Do you think, Sonya, that Carlo knew he was to be cited this afternoon?" she demanded. "He has always said that his own share in the expedition into the German lines last summer was a failure and that the success was entirely due Lieutenant Wainwright, Mildred Thornton's fiancé. Has Carlo spoken to you on the subject recently? Had he been told he was to be decorated?"

A little absently the older woman nodded, at the present moment she was thinking of other matters even more absorbing than Carlo Navara's recent honor, proud as she felt of her friend.

Earlier in the day her husband, Dr. David Clark, the surgeon in charge of the Red Cross hospital, had confided in her that a unit of his nurses and physicians were to follow the American army to the frontiers of Germany. Dr. Clark had also asked his wife's advice with regard to the nurses who had best accompany them. Therefore, all the afternoon, with her subconscious mind Sonya had been endeavoring to meet and unravel this personal problem, at the same time she shared in the interest of the military ceremony to which she had been a witness.

"Yes, I believe Carlo did know what he might expect Bianca," she answered finally. "At least he told me a day or so ago he had received some word that there was to be some public recognition of his deed. I suppose Carlo did not like to discuss the matter generally as he is a more modest soldier than he is an artist."

The younger girl flushed.

"Just the same I should think Carlo might also have confided in me. I wonder if he will ever realize that you are not the best friend he has in the world, even if he does continue to think so."

The older woman smiled without replying.

Sonya knew that some day Bianca would recover from her childish jealous relation between herself and Carlo Navara.

Of late Carlo, himself, had grown entirely sensible, appreciating the fact that her marriage had ended forever his mistaken romantic attachment for a woman so much older than himself, to whose kindness in caring for him during his illness in Italy he believed he owed so much.

Moreover, Sonya's attention was soon engaged in watching the storm. During the past two hours the snow fall had been growing heavier until now it lay thick along the road and was blown into drifts by the roadside. The wind was swirling in fierce gusts and forming whirlwinds of snow in unexpected places. Save for the lights in their motor car the way was nearly dark, as daylight had almost completely disappeared.

Cautiously, although driving his car at a fairly rapid pace, the chauffeur was speeding toward the hospital. Then suddenly without warning he stopped his car so abruptly that its occupants were thrown forward out of their seats.

"What is it, what has happened?" Sonya Clark asked, as soon as she had recovered sufficient breath, then opening the door of the closed car she peered out into the snow-covered road.

A little beyond she was able to see an object lying in the road only a few feet beyond their car.

In the semi-darkness and at the distance, with the snow forming a thick veil between, it was impossible to tell just what the object might be. Partly covered with snow and showing no sign of movement it was probably an animal that had gone astray and been frozen in the November storm.

Quickly Sonya got out of the car followed by Mildred Thornton and Ruth Carroll, the other girls remaining in the automobile at her request.

The chauffeur joined them.

The next moment the four of them were bending over the figure of a young girl, who was wearing a close fitting cap and a long dark blue coat, and sewed on her sleeve a small Red Cross.

Yet when Sonya spoke to her, she showed no sign of being able to reply and made no movement, not even to the raising of her lashes. When the

chauffeur lifted and placed her inside the car she still seemed unconscious.

"I think we had best go on to the hospital at once," Sonya commanded. "We are not more than a few moments' journey and whatever should be done for this girl can be better accomplished there."

CHAPTER II

A Late Recruit

A LITTLE before noon the following day, Mrs. David Clark, the wife of the surgeon in command of the Red Cross hospital near Château-Thierry, entered a small room in one of the towers of the old French château, which had been serving as a hospital for the American wounded.

The room was in the portion of the building set apart for the use of the Red Cross nurses.

Opening the door quietly and without knocking, Sonya stood for a moment in silence upon the threshold, staring in polite amazement at the figure she beheld sitting upright in the small hospital bed.

The figure was that of a young girl with straight brown hair cut short and parted at one side, a rather thin white face with a pointed chin and large hazel eyes. There was a boyish, or perhaps more of a sprite-like quality in her appearance. As Sonya looked straightway she saw a fleeting picture of Peter Pan, before the girl turned and spoke to her.

"You are Mrs. Clark aren't you? You are very kind to come to ask about me. I am sorry I gave you so much trouble yesterday; another mile or more and I should have arrived safely at the hospital and been none the worse for my long walk. You won't mind if I go on eating a moment longer, will you? I am dreadfully hungry and I have just succeeded in persuading the charming little girl who is taking care of me that there is nothing in the world the matter with me today, except the need for food. I really feel no worse from yesterday's experience, although it is nice to be so deliciously warm after one has come fairly near being frozen."

As the girl talked, the older woman came and took a little chair beside the bed. The newcomer to the hospital, who had been rescued from the snow storm the afternoon before, Sonya now discovered was not so young

as she had originally believed. On closer observation there were tiny lines about the girl's eyes, a little droop at the corners of her mouth, which might, however, be due partly to fatigue and exposure.

"When you feel inclined and if you are strong enough, I wonder if you will not tell me something about yourself and where you were trying to go when we picked you up yesterday? Red Cross nurses have been in many unexpected places since the beginning of the war, yet one scarcely looks to find one lost in the snow in such a picturesque fashion," Sonya suggested half smiling and half serious.

In answer to Sonya's speech, the girl pushed the tray of food which by this time she had finished eating, to the bottom of her bed and sat resting her chin in the palms of her hands. She was leaning forward with her shoulders lifted and wearing a little white flannel dressing sacque which Bianca Zoli must have loaned to her.

"I want very much to explain to you, Mrs. Clark, and I am entirely all right again, only perhaps a little tired from my adventure. I do not seem even to have taken cold. First of all my name is Nora Jamison and I have traveled all the way from California to France, across a country and across an ocean. Was it my good fortune or my ill fortune that I landed in Paris just three days before the armistice was signed to begin my Red Cross nursing? I have been looking forward to the opportunity it seems to me for years. Oh, I have done war nursing, but near one of the California camps."

The girl turned her eyes at this moment to glance out the small window cut into the wall just beside her bed.

They were remarkable eyes, Sonya had already observed, sometimes a light brown in shade, then flecked with green and grey tones. Not in any sense was the rest of the face beautiful, although oddly interesting, the nose long and delicate, the lips thin with slightly irregular white teeth.

"I want to see what this French country is like, Mrs. Clark, see it until I shall never forget its desolation as compared to the fruitfulness and tranquility of our own. Some day when I return home I mean to make some of my own country people share my impression with me."

Then without further explanation of her meaning she turned again to her companion.

"I wonder if you are going to be willing to do me a great favor? Strange, I know, to be asking a favor of some one who has never seen one and knows nothing of one, save that I am already in your debt! I want you to take me with you as one of your Red Cross nurses to work with the army of occupation on the Rhine. Please don't refuse me yet.

"When I arrived in Paris three days before the signing of the armistice I was kept waiting there until the day after the celebration. Then I was told that if I preferred I could stay on in Paris a week or more and go back home, since now that the war was over, there would be less need for Red Cross nurses. Yet somehow I managed to plead my cause and the morning after the armistice I was ordered to report to Dr. Clark at his hospital near Château-Thierry. Probably there would be nurses who were tired and would now wish to be discharged and sent home. I was told that a letter had been written Dr. Clark to expect me. There was a very especial reason why I wished to come to this neighborhood which I would like to tell you later. Well, I had a fairly difficult journey from Paris. I was alone and know almost no French. But there was no one to send with me and even the Red Cross organization relaxed just a little with the prospect of peace. Nevertheless nothing happened to me of any importance until I reached the station where I was told some one would be waiting to drive me to the hospital. There was no one. But the mistake was mine, because I thought an old Frenchman told me the Red Cross hospital was only five miles away. At present, knowing my own failure to understand French I think that he probably said fifteen miles. However, I feel I must have walked nearer fifty, if I may exaggerate the actual facts. I kept asking in my best French to be told the proper direction and thinking I understood and then getting lost. When I started out from the little French station it was early in the morning and really not very cold; you must not think I am altogether without judgment. But now that I am safely here, you will take me with you to Germany? Just think how far I have traveled for this chance! Your other nurses have had their opportunity."

Two bright spots of color were at this moment glowing on the girl's cheeks, her lips and eyes were eager as a child.

Nevertheless Sonya shook her head.

"I am sorry, Miss Jamison, but I'm afraid I can't promise anything. In the first place, my husband has already made the choice of the Red Cross nurses who are to form his unit. He selected his staff of nurses and physicians last night. There is no time for delay. The division of troops we are to serve leaves before dawn Sunday morning. The Red Cross units will bring up the rear. We will probably move later on the same morning. Don't think I am not sympathetic; why you must feel like the last of our American troops who reached Château-Thierry the morning of the armistice. Major Hersey told me it was difficult to keep them from fighting, armistice, or no armistice. But you will be able to remain here at the hospital for a time. We still have a number of the wounded to be cared for and more than half the staff will stay behind."

The new nurse covered her eyes for a moment with her hands, they were beautiful nurse's hands, with long slender, firm fingers.

"Mrs. Clark, I haven't any immediate family, the one person I cared for and to whom I was engaged was killed here in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry at one of the first engagements of the United States troops. We had planned to do wonderful things with our life together after the war was past and he was safely home. Now, I haven't the courage, not for a time anyhow, to go on with what we hoped to do. I must have work, change, movement. I am very strong, see how quickly I have recovered from yesterday. To stay here at the hospital and work now that the war is over would of course be better than going home at once. But the hospital will be sure to close in a little time and the men sent nearer the coast so as to be ready to sail as soon as they are able. May I at least talk to Dr. Clark? Will you ask him to give me a few moments? I shall be dressed in a little while and can come to his office."

Sonya rose up from her chair and stood hesitating a moment.

There was something in the girl's story, something in her face which was oddly wistful and appealing. More than an ordinary loss lay behind her quickly told tragedy.

"Why, yes, I'll speak to Dr. Clark if you desire it and in any case he will wish to know you have recovered. Yet I am afraid I cannot truthfully hold out much hope to you. As a matter of fact I have not personally the least influence with my husband in professional matters. If I had, well I should like to take you with our Red Cross unit to the Rhine," and Sonya stooped, obeying an unusual impulse and kissed the new girl lightly on the forehead before leaving her.

CHAPTER III

Toward Germany

"Happy is he who takes the open road,
From rosy sunburst till the stars ascend.
Light is his heart, though heavy be his load,
If love but waits him at his journey's end."

THE two Red Cross nurses, Theodosia Thompson and Ruth Carroll were standing together at the edge of a bleak field in the dawn of a mid-November morning. Their companion was a young American physician. "What an extraordinary quotation under the present circumstances, Thea! But then, since you are a bundle of contradictions, I presume you suggest that love will await us at our journey's end when you really mean hate. I wonder to what extent the Germans will hate us and how difficult life will be among them when we occupy their cities on the Rhine."

Ruth Carroll, who had begun her speech as an answer to the other girl, now concluded it by turning her gaze upon Dr. Hugh Raymond, who made no effort at the moment to answer so unanswerable a question.

"Oh, I was not thinking of the entrance of our American troops into Germany, but into Belgium and the little devastated French villages which have not seen a friendly face in over four years," Theodosia Thompson replied. "Our soldiers must first pass through the rescued towns. But actually, Ruth, I was not thinking deeply at all. With the knowledge that we were soon to take the open road, the verse came into my mind. Please don't always be so matter of fact."

Possibly the two girls were talking because it is so difficult for girls to remain silent for any length of time even under the most amazing conditions. At this moment, peering steadfastly through the grey light of the approaching day, with Dr. Raymond beside them, they were beholding one

of the greatest spectacles in human history, the first movement of the American Army of Occupation toward the Rhine.

In line with the vision of the three watchers at this instant khaki-clad figures were marching slowly forward with their faces turned toward the east. Behind them down the long road ammunition and supply trains were lumbering; cannons and big guns were groaning their way onward as in time of war. But although it was not war, but the vanguard of peace, nevertheless the American soldiers were prepared for war, should the armistice be ended at any moment. Overhead observation balloons were floating, which were to move more rapidly than the army and form a part of the advance guard.

"We are scheduled to enter Virton some time tomorrow, Miss Thompson. Virton is the first town across the Belgian border, then Briey and Longwy and then the little Duchy of Luxemburg. It is a great trek and I am glad to be allowed to join it. Yet somehow I wish we were sending our nurses in dirigibles so as to make the journey more quickly and safely. We have suffered so much from German treachery in the past that I can't quite trust them on this march. Yet personally I wish I could have gone with the soldiers."

The young American doctor spoke slowly and solemnly. He was a tall slender fellow with sandy hair and a rather finely cut face, a little Roman in type. His manner was also slightly dictatorial, as if he were a much older and wiser person than his feminine audience, although he was scarcely twenty-five.

Theodosia Thompson paid no attention to his remarks although he seemed to be addressing her; however Ruth Carroll listened as interestedly as any one could have desired.

Dr. Raymond had not been as friendly with the Red Cross nurses at the Château-Thierry hospital as one might naturally have expected, considering the fact that they had worked and dreamed and prayed under the same roof during the last thrilling months before the close of the war. But he was supposed not to care for women or girls, either because he was too shy, or because he suffered from an undue sense of superiority. Notwithstanding, he apparently made a mild exception in favor of Ruth Carroll, although for

her intimate friend and companion, Thea Thompson, ordinarily he had to make an effort to conceal his dislike.

Over the French country this morning the snow of a few days before had hardened and been beaten down into a frost covered layer of mud, yet the wind had become a little quieter and not so piercingly cold.

"Don't you think we had best go back to the hospital in a few moments, Thea?" Ruth at this instant inquired. "There are still preparations for us to make before our Red Cross unit takes its place in the line of march. As a matter of fact I don't think I slept three hours last night, and neither Dr. Clark nor Mrs. Clark made a pretence of going to bed."

Thea linked her arm in Ruth's.

The young physician who was their companion wore a curious, rapt expression. He was still gazing after the moving army, and seemed not to have heard.

"Goodby, Dr. Raymond." Thea made a little curtsy that was unexpectedly graceful. "Thank you for suggesting to Ruth that she see the first breaking of camp of the American Army of Occupation. I know you had not intended that I accompany you, yet thank you just the same. Never so long as I live shall I forget this daybreak in France! Why, it is as if an old world had ended on the eleventh of November and a new one was beginning today! Besides who knows what experiences may lie ahead, or *romances*, Dr. Raymond. You see now the war has ended, perhaps even you may wake up to other interesting facts in life beside professional ones."

With an odd, challenging expression, Thea Thompson watched the young doctor's face, expecting him at least to change color or show some sign of annoyance. However, as he was a good deal taller than she, he merely looked over her head and toward Ruth Carroll.

"If you will forgive me, Miss Carroll, I won't return with you just this minute. I have nothing very special to look after and I want to see as much of this first movement of our army as possible. Afterwards our Red Cross motors and ambulances will probably have to keep in the rear."

Then the two girls moved away toward the Red Cross hospital choosing their route along a path near the edge of the road, so as not to be in the way of the oncoming trucks.

"I do wish you would try not to talk personalities on a morning like this, Thea dear," Ruth urged gently, "and particularly not to Dr. Raymond. I have told you it makes him uncomfortable. He is really not aware that there is a woman or a girl in the world in any personal fashion. I am sure the very word *romance* irritates him. I presume that is why you used it. Don't get into mischief now that the war is over, Thea, because you may have less hard work when you have been so good all the past year. I feel it specially because I know you did not naturally care for nursing and only began it at first in order to come to France with me. Still you have been very successful and perhaps may wish to keep on with nursing as a profession after we return home?"

A little sound that was neither assent nor refusal followed.

Then Thea Thompson shook her head. "Let's don't discuss either the past or the future just now, Ruth. Thank heaven the present is sufficient! I've an idea that once our soldiers reach the Rhine and settle down they will be needing entertainment as much as they will need nursing. Personally I intend to have a little relief from this long strain and have as good a time as possible. Oh, don't look so shocked, Ruth. I don't intend to do anything especially wicked, play a little perhaps and be a little frivolous. You and I are certainly contrasts as Kentucky girls! You know there may be a chance we may run across a little princess somewhere in hiding and that she may fall in love with one of our American soldiers. American soldiers are greater than kings these days, and princesses are in need of protection. So perhaps I may be a looker-on at some one else's romance and not have one of my own. I have been a looker-on at many things I have wished for myself before today, Ruth, as you know. But please let us hurry. I promised Mrs. Clark we would not stay away from the hospital but a short time and I wish to keep my word. She does not like me particularly, or at least I seem to puzzle her."

Ruth Carroll shook her head. The girl beside her had not had a happy childhood or young girlhood, so perhaps it was natural that she should wish,

as she expressed it, "just to have a good time."

"You puzzle a good many people, Thea, including me and sometimes you even puzzle yourself. But you know I have always believed the good would win in the end. Don't spoil your nursing record. We are very fortunate to have been chosen to form a part of the Red Cross unit to follow the army."

At this moment the grey November clouds parted and a pale rose appeared in the sky.

The two girls were reaching the neighborhood of their Red Cross hospital. Drawn up nearby were half a dozen Red Cross ambulances, an equal number of closed cars and several large trucks for carrying medical supplies.

Moving about and directing the hospital orderlies was Dr. David Clark, the surgeon in command of the hospital. He had been ordered to take charge of the Red Cross unit, who were to follow the division of American troops from the neighborhood of Château-Thierry to the Rhine to assist in policing Germany.

With him at the moment, and aiding in a hundred small ways, was his wife, Sonya Clark.

As the two nurses approached and Dr. Clark caught sight of them, he frowned with disapproval and surprise.

At the instant it seemed impossible to guess what two of his nurses could be doing off duty at daybreak on this morning of all mornings.

Sonya understood and nodded sympathetically.

"You have been to see our troops break camp and start for Germany? I remember you asked permission. I envy you girls the experience, although we shall probably see many extraordinary sights before this day is over. We shall leave in a few hours; naturally it will not take long for us in motor cars, to catch up with the soldiers who are traveling afoot. You will be ready. I hope the sky at present is a good omen of the future."

And Sonya pointed to the rose light overhead.

Later in the day, the Red Cross unit from the hospital in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry took its place in the rear of the line of march of the American Army of Occupation toward Germany.

By this time the sun was shining and the roads had become comparatively clear. Hospital supplies had been sent on ahead with a group of hospital orderlies, Dr. Clark and a corps of his physicians following soon after.

In a later automobile Mrs. Clark had with her half a dozen Red Cross nurses, and in a second Miss Blackstone, the former superintendent of the hospital, an equal number. Also there was a third automobile filled with physicians and orderlies who were to keep as close to the two other cars as circumstances allowed.

Across No Man's land on this November morning, from the northern end of France to the southern, were passing the victorious allied armies, three hundred thousand American troops led by Pershing to victory, and an equal or greater number of French and British.

In the car with Sonya the American girls had but little to say to one another during the first part of their journey. Not only was the land before them desolate beyond description, but filled with tragic memories.

Early in the afternoon, reaching the edge of a little French town, the Red Cross automobiles stopped. The occupants were in no great hurry to move forward. In advance the cavalry had swept on to prepare the way, but the infantry was going ahead slowly and would encamp for the night. This division of the Red Cross intended keeping in the background so that in case the men became ill, they could drop out and be overtaken by nurses and physicians.

The girls were glad of the rest and also extraordinarily hungry, having spent the greater part of the night and every moment since daylight in preparation for the advance.

Their three cars had stopped in front of a small farmhouse on the outskirts of the town.

Approaching the house, Sonya and Dr. Raymond believed it to be empty. The blinds were closed, the pathway to the front door untrodden. Yet it had once been a gay little house of French grey with bright blue shutters.

A knock at the door and both Sonya and the young physician thought they heard scurrying noises inside. Yet knocking again there was no reply.

"Shall I try pushing the little front door open, Mrs. Clark? It is pretty cold eating outside. I can't quite understand the situation. The French people know we are their friends; they have been told to expect nothing but kindness and consideration from us. Do look, already the French civilians are coming out from the village to welcome us. Our little house is surely uninhabited or it would not be so inhospitable."

Following Dr. Raymond's suggestion, Sonya turned.

Standing not far away in a group were the six Red Cross nurses for whom she felt especially responsible, Nona Davis and Mildred Thornton, the two girls who were her intimate and devoted friends and who had made exceptional sacrifices to remain in Europe now that the war was ended. There were also the two comparatively new nurses, Ruth Carroll and Theodosia Thompson, and Bianca Zoli. The sixth girl was the Red Cross nurse, Nora Jamison, who had arrived so late at the hospital. Nevertheless she had been chosen by Dr. Clark to form a member of his Red Cross unit who were to follow the army of occupation.

Beyond them was another group of nurses and physicians.

To Sonya's surprise she saw approaching at this moment from the little French town close by between fifty and a hundred persons. Some of them were old men and women hobbling along on sticks, their faces gaunt and haggard with past suffering, but shining now with happiness. A dozen or more little French girls were marching abreast, one of them carrying a small American flag, another a French. Both flags were evidently home made and must have been carefully hidden from the Germans during their long occupancy of the French village. With them were five or six American soldiers who had been taken prisoners by the Germans and were now being allowed to rejoin their own comrades.

"We haven't a great deal of food, I know," Sonya began impulsively. "But don't you think, Dr. Raymond, we might ask the friends who have come to welcome us and who seem hungriest to share our food? A great quantity of supplies are to follow us and we will probably wait for a few days somewhere along the line of march. Dr. Clark told me he wanted us to be prepared to care for the wounded American soldiers we meet along the way, soldiers who have been imprisoned in Germany and must have suffered untold tortures from improper treatment. Then, if any of our own soldiers are taken ill along the route of march, Dr. Clark is to see they are left in a comfortable hospital with the necessary supplies and it may be we shall be delayed to look after them."

Forgetting her effort to enter the little house, Sonya at this instant moved away from Dr. Raymond to rejoin the other Red Cross nurses.

In French fashion some of the old peasants were kissing the hands of their allies. Miss Blackstone and a physician had already unwound a dirty bandage from the arm of an American soldier and were examining his wound. Sonya had no desire to be left out of the little crowd of French and American friends.

Within fifteen minutes, however, she had again returned to the little house. This time she was accompanied by an old French peasant woman to whom she had explained the situation, inquiring if the farmhouse was in truth uninhabited.

At present it was the French woman who hammered, not gently but with the utmost firmness upon the closed door.

"It may not be possible, madame, that we enter in at the front door," she explained. "It is my impression that la petite Louisa has never once unfastened this door since she opened it to the German soldiers who afterwards took away her mother and older sister. She has been here ever since all alone, as her father and brother were of course with the army. La petite Louisa has since that time been distrait, not you understand exactly in her right senses, but harmless. It is not that her French neighbors have neglected her. I have myself tried to take her home to be with me, but always she comes back to the little grey house."

The old peasant shrugged her shoulders, as she continued banging on the door and talking at the same time.

"There have been so many things to endure. One more forsaken, half starved child! What would you do? Her family was not well known in our village; they had moved here from Paris a short time before the war and were said to have been wealthy people who had fallen into misfortune. So after a time, it may not seem kind, but life has been too hard some of the days even for kindness, so finally we left the little girl alone. Neighbors have given her food when there was food to give. Even a few of the enemy soldiers have sometimes tried to make friends and persuade her to eat, but always she would rush away from them with the great fear."

Not altogether sure of what the old French peasant was trying to make plain to her, yet convinced enough of the tragedy of the story, Sonya laid her hand on the old woman's arm.

"Don't you think we had best not frighten the little girl then by trying to enter her house. Some one else in the village I feel sure will offer us hospitality. And yet something should be done for the little girl, now the war is past she must be made to understand she need not be afraid," Sonya expostulated.

However, the French woman continued knocking.

She also had been calling out in French, reassuring the little girl inside, pleading with her. "La petite Louisa."

And now Sonya heard footsteps drawing near the closed door. The next moment the door partly opened, disclosing the most pathetic child's figure she had ever seen.

The little girl was perhaps twelve years old and did not look like the usual French child, for though her hair was coal black, her eyes were a violet blue, fringed by the blackest lashes, her skin almost an unearthly pallor. In spite of her look of hunger she was clean and not only scrupulously, but exquisitely dressed in a little silk and serge frock made with care and taste.

The child's eyes were what held Sonya, however, they were at once so terrified and so sad.

Looking past the two women at the crowd outside, she would have fallen except that Sonya's arm went swiftly around her while she tried to explain that they were friends.

Afterwards Sonya and the Red Cross nurses discovered that the little house was furnished very differently from the ordinary French farmhouse, with possessions which must have come from some handsomer home.

In the dining room they ate their luncheon on a French oak table with beautiful carved feet and found that the sideboard and chairs were also of handsome French oak.

The little room soon became crowded, not only with the Red Cross girls and physicians, but with a number of the French people who came in to assist in the celebration. Beyond gifts of chocolate and bread, they refused to accept other food, explaining that the portion of the American army which had passed through their village earlier in the day had given them supplies.

Yet the little French girl in whose home the celebration was taking place would neither eat nor speak to her French acquaintances or to the strange Americans.

Sonya and Miss Blackstone confided to each other their impression that the little girl was probably unable to speak, fright and exhaustion having oftentimes this effect upon highly nervous temperaments.

However, in the midst of the luncheon, suddenly the little French girl slipped over beside the new Red Cross nurse, Nora Jamison, and took tight hold of her hand. She even allowed her to tempt her into eating small morsels of food.

By accident the new nurse was sitting next Sonya Clark and Sonya turned to her, mystified by the little French girl's impetuous action.

"I wonder how you managed that, Miss Jamison?" she inquired. "I have been trying to make friends with our little French hostess ever since my

meeting with her and she would have nothing to do with me. You seem not to have noticed her and she has given her confidence to you."

Still holding the little French girl's hand Nora Jamison nodded.

"You will find I am a kind of Pied Piper, Mrs. Clark. I had always nursed children before I began war work and am especially fond of them."

Sonya shook her head.

"It is Peter Pan I thought of when I first saw you. I wonder if you are one of the lucky persons who never grow up? I've an idea you will be a great help to us when we finally reach Germany. We don't want the German children to think of us as ogres and one wonders what stories their parents may now be telling them of our American soldiers."

Then so many things distracted Sonya Clark's attention that she thought no more of the little deserted French girl until she and Bianca looked for her to say goodbye and found that the child had disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

Luxemburg

IN the afternoon, traveling in the direction of Belgium, there was an unexpected movement under the broad seat of the Red Cross car which startled its occupants.

The first exclamation came from Bianca Zoli who happened to be sitting just over a space where a large box of provisions originally had been stored. The box had been removed, however, and the food eaten at luncheon.

"I am absurd!" Bianca exclaimed, clutching at Nora Jamison's hand, as she was sitting beside her. "But I thought I felt something stir. I wonder if the excitement of our journey is having a strange influence upon me?"

"I don't think so," the older girl returned, "I have been conscious of life, a movement of some kind underneath us ever since we left the little French farmhouse. I say I have been conscious, no, I have not been exactly that, only puzzled and uncomfortable."

Leaning over, Nora at this instant lifted the curtain, and Bianca bending forward at the same time, they both became aware of the figure of the little French girl who had vanished a few moments before their departure from her home.

"Sonya!" Bianca called.

This was scarcely necessary, since by this time every occupant of the car knew equally well what had happened and curiously enough, without discussion, understood the explanation for the child's action.

The little girl had believed that this group of women and girls, wearing the Red Cross of service, were her friends and if possible would protect her from what she feared most in all the world, the grey uniformed German soldiers. Also they were leaving the neighborhood where she had lived under a burden of terror.

Her one desire was to escape from the captured town where the Germans had been in authority so many weary months. As Nora Jamison and Bianca

both struggled to assist the child, they found she could scarcely help herself, so stiff had she become from her uncomfortable position.

Yet she managed with their aid to climb up and sit crowded close between Bianca and Nora Jamison.

"What are you going to do with this child, Sonya?" Bianca demanded, more sympathetic than she cared to reveal, remembering her own childhood, which had been more lonely and difficult than any one had ever realized. Not even Sonya, who had come to her rescue in those past days in Italy, more from a combination of circumstance than from any great affection for her, had ever understood.

In response Sonya bit her lips and frowned. There was something about the little French girl which had attracted her strongly at the first sight of her, an attraction she could not have explained, unless it were compassion, and yet she had seen many pathetic, forsaken children during her war work in France.

"I am sure I don't know, Bianca," she replied finally. "I suppose we can leave the child with some French family along our route. However, most of them have responsibilities enough of their own, without our adding a child whose last name we do not even know and who appears unable to tell us anything about herself."

"We cannot take the child back to her own home, even if we could turn back, which is of course out of the question. I would not have the courage to leave the little girl alone there, when she has showed so plainly her wish to escape. Oh, well, life is full enough of problems and some one will surely take the child off our hands! people in adversity are wonderfully kind to one another; our life in France during the war has taught us that much."

Both Sonya and Bianca were speaking English so that the little interloper would not be able to understand what they were saying.

"I wonder why we cannot take 'La petite Louisa' along with us, Sonya? After all one little girl more or less won't matter and we may need her for our mascot in the new work that lies before us. I don't know why I feel the Red Cross nursing with the army of occupation will have new difficulties our former nursing did not have. Perhaps because the soldiers will probably

not be seriously ill and are likely to be a great deal more bored," Mildred Thornton urged.

Sonya shook her head.

"Mildred, it is a little embarrassing to have to speak of it, but please remember my husband is something of a martinet in matters of Red Cross discipline. I am afraid he will not think we have the right to add a little girl to our responsibilities. However, the child is with us now not by our choice, and we must make her as comfortable as possible until we have some inspiration concerning her. Miss Jamison, you will look after her, won't you, since she seems to prefer you?"

But already Nora Jamison had assumed that the care of the little French girl had been entrusted to her as a matter of course.

Later, the journey through France and into Belgium and thence into Luxemburg became, not only for the American army but for the Red Cross units which accompanied it, a triumphant procession.

In every little village along their route bells were rung, schools closed while the children and the citizens gathered in the streets to shout their welcome. Through the country at each crossroads groups of men, women and young people were found waiting to express their thankfulness either with smiles or tears.

Thirty-six hours after leaving their hospital near Château-Thierry, Mrs. Clark and her Red Cross workers crossed the frontier of Belgium and entered the little town of Virton.

In Virton, at the Red Cross headquarters, awaiting them they found orders from Dr. David Clark. As promptly as possible they were to proceed to the capital of Luxemburg and there establish a temporary Red Cross hospital. Dr. Hugh Raymond was to take charge with Miss Blackstone as superintendent, the Red Cross nurses assuming their usual duties. Before their arrival arrangements for their reception would have been made and a house secured for their temporary hospital.

This was necessary since along the route of march numbers of soldiers were being attacked by influenza and must be cared for. Ordinary hospitals

were already overcrowded with wounded American soldiers who had been prisoners in Germany.

Therefore, obeying orders, this particular Red Cross unit entered Luxemburg a few hours before the arrival of General Pershing at the head of his victorious troops.

It was early morning when the Red Cross girls drove into the little duchy, which has occasioned Europe trouble out of all proportion to its size. Actually the duchy of Luxemburg is only nine hundred and ninety-nine square miles and has a population of three hundred thousand persons.

Just as surely as Germany tore up her treaty with Belgium as a "scrap of paper," when at the outbreak of the war it suited her convenience, as surely had she marched her army across Luxemburg in spite of the protest of its young Grand Duchess Marie Adelaide.

However, when Germany continued to use Luxemburg as an occupied province, the Grand Duchess was supposed to have changed her policy and to have become a German ally.

On the morning when the American Red Cross entered her capital, the grey swarm of German soldiers was hurrying rapidly homeward, broken and defeated, while the American army under General Pershing was hourly expected.

To make way for the more important reception and to give as little trouble as possible, the American Red Cross drove directly to the house which had been set apart for their use. The house proved to be a large, old fashioned place with wide windows and a broad veranda, and on the principal street of the city not far from the Grand Ducal Palace.

After a few hours of intensive work toward transforming a one-time private residence into a temporary hospital, the entire staff deserted their labors to gather on the broad veranda.

The news had reached them that General Pershing had entered the capital city of Luxemburg and would pass their headquarters on his way to the Grand Ducal Palace for his formal reception by the Grand Duchess.

Later a portion of the American army itself marched by.

From their balcony the American girls could see the stars and stripes mingling with the red, white and blue of the small principality.

Never in their past experience had they seen a welcome to equal the welcome given by the citizens of Luxemburg to the troops which General Pershing had led to victory. If the Grand Ducal family had been won over to the German cause, how deeply the people of Luxemburg had sympathized with the allies was proved by this single day's greeting.

Together with the people in the streets the Red Cross workers found they were shouting themselves hoarse. Yet the shouts were barely heard amid the blowing of whistles, the ringing of bells.

In the hearts of the inhabitants of the tiny duchy apparently there was a great love for the soldiers of the greatest democracy in the world.

From every window along their route of march flowers rained down upon the soldiers, children crowding close presented each American doughboy with a bunch of chrysanthemums; one of them carried a banner on which was inscribed, "The Day of Glory has Arrived."

Turning to speak to Mildred Thornton who stood beside her, Nona Davis found to her surprise that her cheeks were wet with tears. She had not been conscious of them until this instant.

"It pays almost, doesn't it, Mildred, for all the suffering we have witnessed in Europe in the past four years to see the rejoicing of the little nations of Europe over the victory of democracy? Even if the little Grand Duchess is pro-German in sentiment, it is plain enough that her people must have loathed the German occupation of their country. I would not be surprised if the passing of our soldiers may not mean a change of government in Luxemburg. Under the circumstances I wonder how long our Red Cross unit may remain?"

Mildred Thornton shook her head.

"Impossible to guess of course, Nona. And yet I am glad of the opportunity. We shall have nursed in one more country in Europe and

perhaps even little Luxemburg will offer us new experiences and new friends."

CHAPTER V

Shoals

DURING the thirty odd years of her life, Sonya Valesky, now Mrs. David Clark, had been through many and varied adventures; some of them, in her young womanhood in Russia, had been tragic, others merely difficult. But after a few days in Luxemburg, amid the effort to establish the temporary Red Cross hospital, Sonya believed that she had rarely suffered a more trying interlude.

It was not the actual work of the hospital arrangements or the care of the sick. Of the first Miss Blackstone took charge and she was eminently capable; for the second Dr. Hugh Raymond was responsible. Both of them had able assistants. The upper part of the house was set apart for the care of the officers and soldiers suffering from influenza, and there were about twenty cases; the second floor was reserved as sleeping quarters for the staff with a few extra rooms for patients who were ill and in need of attention from other causes so they should not be exposed to contagion. On the lower floor was a reception room, dining room and kitchen, with the drawing room for convalescents.

But as usual Sonya Clark's task was looking after the Red Cross nurses, seeing not only that they were in good health, but as happy and contented as possible, giving their best service and in little danger of breakers ahead.

Nevertheless, within forty-eight hours after the passing of the American troops through Luxemburg, it appeared to Sonya that some unexpected change had taken place in her group of Red Cross nurses.

What they were actually ordered to do they did in a fairly dutiful fashion, but the old enthusiasm, the old passionate desire for service had vanished. Among the entire group of nurses a relaxation of discipline had taken place. The excitement of their journey, the knowledge that the war

had ended in the allied victory, a natural desire for pleasure after so long a strain, apparently possessed them alike, except Nora Jamison who was comparatively new to the work, and seemed in every way an unusual girl.

Frankly Bianca Zoli confessed to Sonya, not long after their arrival in Luxemburg, that she was weary of the endless waiting upon the nurses and patients and needed a short rest. And Sonya agreed that this was true. Bianca was younger than any member of their Red Cross unit and had been faithful and untiring in her devotion for many months during the final allied struggle for victory. Moreover, Bianca also appeared slightly depressed and Sonya wisely guessed this was partly due to the long separation from Carlo Navara, which Bianca must see was inevitable. With his regiment Carlo was moving toward the Rhine and nothing was apt to be less in his mind for the time being than his friendship for the young girl whom he undoubtedly regarded only in a semi-brotherly spirit composed of indifference and affection.

Since the greater part of the nursing at the temporary hospital in Luxemburg was the care of the soldiers who were ill with influenza, and feeling that Bianca was not altogether in the right state of health to battle with the contagion, Sonya requested Miss Blackstone to permit her to have a half holiday, doing no work that was not voluntary.

But with Nona Davis and Mildred Thornton, the two Red Cross nurses who had given the most valuable personal service, since the outbreak of the war, the situation was more serious and far more difficult to meet.

They did not neglect their duties, this would have been impossible to either of them, and yet in a way it was plain that they were no longer wholly absorbed by them and to use an old expression, their hearts were no longer in what they were doing.

Yet Sonya understood; both girls were engaged to be married to young American officers who were at present in the United States. With the signing of the armistice they had hoped to return home. It was possible they had made a mistake in agreeing to Dr. Clark's request that they remain for a time longer in Europe, forming a part of his Red Cross unit, who were to care for the soldiers of the American Army of Occupation.

With Mildred Thornton the engagement was comparatively recent. During the latter part of July she had nursed through a dangerous illness, following a wound, an American lieutenant[A] who, together with Carlo Navara, had crossed into the German lines, securing important secret information, afterwards invaluable to Marshal Foch.

Of longer standing was Nona Davis's romance, which had not been of such plain sailing. In the early months after the entry of the United States into the world war, in an American camp in France, she had met and renewed an acquaintance with Lieutenant John Martin which had begun as children years before in the old city of Charleston, South Carolina. Soon after Lieutenant Martin had declared his affection, but believing him arrogant and domineering, Nona had not at that time returned his love.

Later, meeting again upon a United States hospital ship, coming back from France, Nona had discovered Lieutenant Martin, now Captain Martin, blinded through a gallant action on the battlefields of France.

It was then that their former positions were reversed, for Captain Martin would not accept a devotion which he believed born of pity and declined marrying Nona unless his sight were restored. A short time before a letter from New York announced that after an operation, Captain Martin had the right to believe his sight would be fully regained. Therefore would Nona marry him as soon as it could be arranged? And Nona's answer had been to cable, "Yes." [B]

However, both Mildred Thornton and Nona Davis having already sacrificed so much to their four years of Red Cross service in Europe, had decided to make this ultimate sacrifice in the postponing of their happiness. Yet here during the temporary pause of their Red Cross unit in Luxemburg, Sonya was able to see that the two girls were finding their self-surrender harder to accept bravely than they had anticipated. Whenever it was possible without neglecting their duties they were apt to wander off for mutual sympathy and confidences. Even Sonya found herself often ignored or forgotten. Sometimes she feared that they might harbor a slight resentment, because it was her husband, Dr. David Clark, who had asked the personal sacrifice.

With two other of her Red Cross nurses Sonya had neither much sympathy nor understanding. Ruth Carroll had never interested her particularly; she was a large, quiet girl, ordinarily a dutiful and fairly reliable nurse, but without special gifts, although as a matter of fact, Dr. Clark had not shared in his wife's disparaging opinion.

However, Sonya knew herself to be prejudiced and not so much by Ruth herself as by reason of her close friendship with Theodosia Thompson and the younger girl's undoubted influence upon her.

Thea had been right in her supposition that Mrs. Clark neither liked nor trusted her particularly, although Sonya herself had scarcely been aware of her own point of view until after the beginning of the journey of her Red Cross unit toward Germany. Since then Sonya was not at all sure that Thea might not prove an uncomfortable if not an actually mischievous influence.

One of Dr. Clark's old students at a prominent New York Medical University and afterwards his assistant, Dr. Hugh Raymond, was a young physician in whom the older man had extraordinary confidence and for whom he hoped great things. In the Red Cross hospital near Château-Thierry he had done splendid and untiring work. But both Sonya and her husband had often smiled over the young doctor's apparent dislike of women and girls. Not even with Sonya herself had he been willing to be more than coldly friendly.

Yet since the movement of their unit toward the Rhine, Sonya had noticed an odd change in him. At first it had appeared as if Thea's attempts to make him show an interest in her had simply annoyed him. Later she seemed to provoke him. Recently Sonya believed Thea was having a marked effect upon him, sometimes aggravating and at other times pleasing him. And although Sonya believed she understood human nature, she also realized that nothing would irritate her husband more profoundly than to discover any kind of personal feeling existing between his nurses and physicians. During all the Red Cross work in Europe from this complication they had been singularly free.

Moreover, Sonya did not consider that Theodosia Thompson was seriously interested in Dr. Raymond. It was her personal opinion that Thea

simply desired admiration and attention, because her nature was restless and dissatisfied.

And it was with the two nurses, Ruth Carroll and Theodosia Thompson, that Sonya had her first real grievance since the beginning of her Red Cross work.

Among the patients who had been brought to the temporary Luxemburg hospital was Major James Hersey, who had been in command of a battalion near Château-Thierry and had been taken ill with influenza along the route of the march toward Germany.

Perhaps Major Jimmie had been longing too ardently to accompany his picked troops to the left bank of the Rhine; however, he was at present pretty seriously ill.

All day Sonya had been caring for him and at about four o'clock in the afternoon she was beginning to feel that she was growing too tired to be left alone. Major Hersey was delirious and already it was long past the hour when Theodosia Thompson had been expected to relieve her. Yet she continued to wait patiently, not daring to leave her charge even for a moment.

Four o'clock passed and then five and no one entered the sick room, not even one of the Red Cross physicians, and Sonya had been expecting a call from Dr. Raymond some time during the afternoon.

At a little after five, Miss Blackstone stepped in unannounced. She was the superintendent of the hospital and Sonya discovered her looking both worried and worn. She was a large, plain, middle-aged woman who had worked with Dr. Clark for a number of years before his marriage to Sonya, and although she and Sonya had not liked each other in the early days of their acquaintance, they had become far more friendly since.

"I am more sorry than I can say, Mrs. Clark, not to have sent some one in to help you, but the most amazing thing has happened. Just after lunch Miss Thompson and Miss Carroll asked permission to take a short motor ride with Dr. Raymond and Dr. Mendel. Dr. Raymond assured me himself that they would not be gone over an hour. It has been much nearer three hours

and I hardly know what to do. Some accident must have occurred. What do you think we should do?"

Sonya shrugged her shoulders.

"Do? Why nothing but wait. I have an idea nothing has happened beyond the fact that they have forgotten their responsibilities."

FOOTNOTES:

[\[A\]](#) See Red Cross Girls with United States Marines.

[\[B\]](#) See Red Cross Girls Afloat with the Flag.

CHAPTER VI

The Ride

IT was true, as Miss Blackstone had said, that the little party of four, the two Red Cross nurses and two physicians, had started out with the intention of taking only a short drive and returning to the hospital in plenty of time for their duties.

And in spite of the fact that Sonya might be cherishing an unreasonable prejudice, the drive had been proposed by Dr. Raymond first to Theodosia Thompson with the suggestion that she ask Ruth Carroll to accompany them and that he invite Dr. Leon Mendel who was also one of the Red Cross staff.

Early in the morning of the same day a note had been sent to the hospital and a motor car offered to the American Red Cross unit during their stay in Luxemburg. As the note had been delivered to Dr. Raymond he had considered it only courtesy to accept the kindness. He had also been quite selfishly interested in seeing the capital city of Luxemburg and the neighboring country and in enjoying a short respite from his continuous work of establishing the temporary hospital.

If Sonya was annoyed by the young doctor's attitude toward Thea Thompson, assuredly he was more so. Certainly he was not at present under the impression that he actually liked her, only that she had somehow made him realize that he must have always appeared too self-centered and too serious, and that he needed waking up. And certainly Thea was stimulating and now and then amusing.

This afternoon as he was feeling tired he proposed that she occupy the front seat of the little motor car with him, Ruth and Dr. Mendel sitting in the rear.

Following no guide except their own impressions they drove through the city, first past the Grand Ducal Palace then the handsome residences of the nobility and finally to the open country on the outskirts of the city.

To all four of the occupants of the car it seemed to have had wings, so short a time did their drive absorb.

Nevertheless Thea and Dr. Raymond had not enjoyed each other particularly.

They were both tired and Thea was having one of the attacks of depression from which she often suffered. She looked both homely and pale, and even her eyes were less blue beneath their straight, red-brown lashes. Only her red hair breaking into irrepressible little waves under her small hat was full of life and charm.

Reaching the end of the main road from which two country lanes branched off into less inhabited portions of the countryside, Dr. Raymond turned to speak to Ruth Carroll and Dr. Mendel.

"I am sorry, it seems to me our ride has scarcely begun, and yet I feel we had best turn back here. We might allow ourselves a little more time but I am afraid if we try one of these unexplored roads we may lose ourselves somewhere."

Ruth made a little nod of agreement even though her expression revealed disappointment. Dr. Mendel made no reply.

But unexpectedly Dr. Raymond felt a hand laid lightly on his coat sleeve.

"Please do go a little further," Thea begged. "I wonder if you know that although I am a country girl I have ridden in automobiles only a few times in my life before coming to France."

Hesitating the young doctor slowed down his car as if expecting to turn around.

"I am not in the habit of neglecting my duty for any reason whatsoever, Miss Thompson. I have just explained that I dared not attempt a strange

country road for fear we might go astray and our return to the hospital be seriously delayed."

Undoubtedly the young Red Cross doctor's manner was self-righteous and precise, but in answer Thea laughed.

It was an odd laugh which made him flush uncomfortably.

"Oh, please do go back then at once!" she said. "Nothing would make me ask you to disregard your duty. Really Dr. Raymond, it is a wonderful experience to know any one who so perfectly answers all the requirements of a model character. Besides I know you would never do anything because I asked you, although as a matter of fact, we all have the right to our usual two hours off duty this afternoon and less than half of that time has gone by."

There was a little sting of bad temper in Thea Thompson's manner and words which undoubtedly were her heritage along with her brilliant red-gold hair.

Instead of replying Dr. Raymond drove his car, not backward toward the hospital as he had announced his intention of doing, but into one of the country roads leading into an entirely unknown locality.

It would have been difficult for him to have explained his impetuous action.

Half an hour later, at the end of a road which led apparently nowhere, Dr. Raymond stopped his car.

"I think I have already managed to lose the way, thanks to you, Miss Thompson," he announced irritably, "However, I suppose we can simply turn around and go back. Certainly this part of the country is entirely uninteresting without a house or an individual in sight. I was very foolish to agree to your request and shall certainly reproach myself if any one has been in special need of me at the hospital. I only trust we may be able to return as quickly as we have made the trip."

However, Thea made no reply to this reproachful speech except to jump to her feet.

"Look!" she cried dramatically. "What a perfectly charming picture in that field over there! I told you I was from Kentucky and yet I never saw any one ride so beautifully!"

Naturally Thea's companions followed her suggestion.

Just beyond the end of their road was a wide open field thick with winter stubble. In the centre was a tall hurdle intended for jumping.

Riding toward this hurdle at a swift pace was a young girl; she was wearing a close fitting, scarlet riding habit, a little dark hat of some kind and high riding boots.

Her horse was almost equally slim and beautiful, and horse and rider had the suggestion of oneness which is the attribute of perfect riding.

There was no other human being in sight.

The girl was making straight for the hurdle. Evidently she and her horse were both in the habit of jumping for neither showed the least sign of nervousness.

Breathless with admiration and interest the two American girls and their companions watched.

The horse rose in the air, his head a little forward, the rider holding the bridle with just the right degree of freedom and firmness.

She was sitting perfectly still, her body in entire accord with the movement of her horse. No one beholding her would have dreamed of an accident. Yet when the horse had actually cleared the hurdle without difficulty and had reached the ground on the further side, the girl must have released her hold. In any event she fell forward over the horse's head, one of the front hoofs striking her.

First out of the car was Thea Thompson followed by Dr. Raymond, then Ruth and the other Red Cross physician.

The girl they found to be unconscious from a wound in her forehead.

"I don't see why we seem to be in the habit of rescuing people nearly every time I go out in a motor car," said Thea. "Certainly I never saw so pretty a girl as this one, I hope she is not seriously hurt."

Dr. Raymond wore his most professional air.

"It is impossible to say at present," he returned severely.

CHAPTER VII

An Unexpected Situation

"**B**UT I don't wish to leave the hospital, I am comfortable here and Mrs. Clark says they are pleased to have me. Besides I could not possibly be moved just now, I am sure I could not endure it."

The young girl who was talking lay surrounded by pillows in a wide, old-fashioned bed in the American Red Cross hospital in Luxemburg.

Partly from excitement and also because it was characteristic, a brilliant color flamed the girl's cheeks. At present there was a little frown between her dark, finely lined brows.

"You must be glad not to have me at home for a time, knowing how we disagree on every important question. And, as for my absence from the palace, I am sure it can only be a relief. You know just how popular I am there at present in the midst of—"

The woman who was standing beside the bed, leaning over at this instant placed her fingers on the girl's lips.

"Don't talk nonsense and under no circumstances speak of so serious a matter where we may be overheard by strangers, my dear child. Please realize that the Americans are unknown people to us and if there are reasons why it is best we should be cordial, there is an even more important reason why, at present, we should keep our own council. A girl's opinions on matters of state are really not vital, unless the girl chances to be the Grand Duchess Marie Adelaide. As her cousin you perhaps take yourself too seriously. But I am not offering you advice, merely telling you that your father desires that you be moved to your own home as soon as your physicians think it advisable. The court physician will call on you at the hospital this afternoon. Both your father and I are at a loss to understand

how you managed to fall from your horse when ordinarily you are so skilful a rider."

The speaker was a severe, elderly person, rather massive, and dressed in a heavy black silk gown, with her white hair piled high under an imposing bonnet and her thin lips drawn into an annoyed line.

Nevertheless, she managed to keep the tones of her voice fairly even.

"Naturally enough I realize, Charlotta, that you would refuse to be influenced by me, although for that matter you have never been influenced by any one from the time you were a child."

The girl bit her lips.

"I am afraid I am not well enough to argue at present and my unfortunate disposition, Tante, is rather a time-worn subject between us. I shall do no harm here, only rest and have a little peace from our everlasting discussions. Besides, you do not seem to consider the fact that I happen to be rather seriously hurt. No one knows how seriously at present, a broken arm and a cut on one's head are not comfortable afflictions, even if they are not dangerous. But the physicians at the American Red Cross hospital who were good enough to rescue and bring me here seem to believe there may be other complications and that I had best stay where I am for the present. Please be as gracious as possible, I have asked Mrs. Clark to come in this afternoon and be introduced to you. Her husband is a prominent American surgeon who has gone on with General Pershing toward Germany. She is here with a few other Red Cross nurses caring for a number of American soldiers until they are well enough to be moved. I think we owe her special courtesy as a guest in our country."

"I am apt to forget the fact Charlotta, or what is required of me, even though I do regard it as unfortunate that the American army should have left us a special reminder of their visit, once having passed through our country."

There was an iciness in the manner of the Countess Scherin which gave one the right to believe that she had no enthusiasm for the American army, whatever personal reasons of state might compel her to courtesy.

Before replying the young Countess Charlotta Scherin dropped back on her pillows.

"If you don't mind, Tante, would you mind ringing the bell? I am sure you would prefer seeing Mrs. Clark in the drawing-room and I am suffering a good deal just at this moment and would like to be quiet. After all you know this house is mine and this bed on which I am at present lying was once my own mother's. If for reasons of state I was allowed to offer my house to the American Red Cross during their stay in Luxemburg, it seems to me like fate that I should be brought here after my accident. But please don't mention to Mrs. Clark that this is my house. It was offered to the American Red Cross in the name of the city."

A moment later Bianca Zoli appeared to escort their distinguished visitor downstairs.

About to leave the room she beheld an imploring glance in the dark eyes of the girl on the bed and going closer heard her whisper:

"Do please come back as soon as you can, I don't really need anything except that I am lonely."

Returning fifteen minutes later, it was then after five o'clock and dusk was gathering in the fine, old-fashioned chamber, so Bianca Zoli quietly sat down without speaking in the chair which had just been vacated by the elderly countess.

The girl upon the bed appeared to be asleep at the moment, but as Bianca had no other duty to occupy her it struck her that it might be entertaining to sit in the big, strange room watching her companion and thinking of her story, or at least of its brief outline which was all she knew at present.

Having witnessed the girl's accident and finding her unconscious and therefore unable to explain her name or identity, it had appeared to both the young American physicians and nurses that the best solution would be to bring her as swiftly as possible to their own hospital. After she had received the necessary attention there would be time and opportunity to discover her family and friends.

A few hours afterwards, when the girl herself returned to consciousness, she explained that she was the young Countess Charlotta Scherin and lived with her father and aunt on their estate at a short distance from the city. The greater part of her time, however, she spent at the Grand Palace with her cousins, the Grand Duchess Marie Adelaide and her five younger sisters.

She seemed to be in a great deal of pain and yet not particularly unhappy over her accident, only asking that her father be informed that she was in safe hands. And if it were possible and not too much trouble could she remain at the American Red Cross hospital until her recovery?

Yet Bianca had only considered her companion for a few moments when she became aware that the other girl had opened her eyes and was looking with the deepest interest at her.

"I am so glad to have the chance to know American girls," she began. "It may strike you as odd but I have wanted to know them all my life and now through my accident I am to have the opportunity. But you look very young and fragile to have undertaken Red Cross work during the war. I believe it is the courage, the way in which you go ahead and do what you wish and face the consequences afterwards, that I so much admire."

Bianca shook her head.

"It is odd your saying this to me of all persons, because I used to feel a good deal as you do. You see I am not altogether an American girl; my mother was an Italian and my father an American, but I have been living in the United States and I confess I have tried to make myself as like one as possible. But do you think you ought to talk? I'll talk to you if you like, although I am not very interesting; I'm afraid you must be suffering a great deal."

Bianca made this final remark because her companion was evidently struggling to keep back the tears which had suddenly filled her eyes.

"Yes, do please talk to me, I am suffering, but I think it is more because I am worried and unhappy than because I am in such pain that I lose my self-control. I have always prided myself on being able to endure physical pain. What are you thinking about?"

Bianca's large dark eyes which were her only southern inheritance had unexpectedly assumed a questioning expression, although her lips had framed no question.

"Why, I was merely thinking of how odd life is and how few persons, even young girls are particularly happy. A moment ago I was sitting here envying you because your life seemed so wonderful to me. You have been brought up amid wealth and have a title of your own and live a part of the time in a palace with real duchesses. I suppose my speech does not sound very democratic, yet I think you might find a good many American girls who would envy you for these same reasons."

"Then they would be extremely stupid," the other girl answered, "because freedom is sometimes the most important thing in the world to an individual as it may be to a state.

"Suppose, oh, leaving me out of the question altogether, but just suppose that any girl's mother had died when the girl was a baby only one year old. Then suppose the child had been brought up by her father and aunt both of whom were twice the age of the girl's own mother. Then remember her mother was French and the girl always loved only the things which concerned her mother, had learned to speak her language and had written letters to all her family, but had never been allowed to visit them because the girl's father and aunt believed only in German ideals and in German customs and wished to separate her wholly from her mother's country and people. Moreover, they had neither of them ever been able to forgive her because she had not been a boy and so been trained for the army, the German army if possible. Then suppose the girl had loved only the outdoors and horses and dogs as if she had been a boy, but because she was a girl had to be trained in all the German ways. As for living in a palace, it is hard sometimes to do and say the proper thing all the time, when you feel they don't believe in the things you believe. Oh, I am not saying the fault is not mine—"

The girl stopped an instant.

"But I was not supposed to be talking about myself, still you must have guessed."

"I should not have guessed unless you wished me to guess," Bianca replied in the prim little fashion of her childhood which she had never lost from her manner and which amused and pleased her friends.

"No, you would not have guessed, you are a dear," the Countess Charlotta answered with an impulsiveness which was an entire contrast to Bianca's nature.

"But what I wanted to explain to you is that you were envying what you thought were my circumstances. You were not really thinking of me at all. You see one might be a princess and be very unhappy and one might be a very humble person and just the opposite. Then I think we ought to realize that a princess may be very horrid and a beggar maid most wonderful."

The young countess hesitated.

"I thought that what I have just said is what Americans believed. Don't they think that human beings are equal and that it all depends on what they do with their own lives, what they are able to make of themselves?"

Bianca shook her head.

"I don't know, you had better talk to some one else on this question instead of to me. I am not at all clever, even my best friends, Sonya Clark and Carlo Navara, do not think I am clever. But there is one thing I understand at present. You have told me a great many interesting facts about yourself, but there is something else on your mind which you have not confided to me. It is something which makes you wish you were an American girl because you believe in that case you could do what you like. I think you wish to confide in some one, but can't quite decide. If I were in your place I would try not to worry until you are better, then if you want some one to talk to, don't choose me. I should never be able to give you any worthwhile advice. But talk to Mrs. Clark, Sonya Clark. She has had a very unusual life and is one of the most wonderful friends in the world!"

The older girl was by this time lying back on her pillows and gazing at Bianca with an odd smile.

"You know," she said finally, "I would not be surprised if your friends are mistaken in thinking you are not clever. Perhaps I shall take your

advice. I suppose I had best try now to go to sleep, I am afraid I have already talked too much."

CHAPTER VIII

The Countess's Story

A FEW days later it had become unnecessary for the little Countess Charlotta to confide her secret to Bianca Zoli, or Sonya, or to any one else at the temporary Red Cross hospital in the capital city of Luxemburg. Already her history had been openly discussed by visitors to the hospital, even by the servants who were assisting with the household work.

It was a well-known fact, apparently, that marriage was being arranged for the youthful countess by her father and aunt to an elderly German nobleman.

Nor was the little countess's opposition to the match, her refusal to consider it as a possibility any more of a secret than the knowledge that no attention was being paid her protests.

Inquiring the name of the girl who might be regarded as the prettiest and the most wilful among the daughters of the noble families of Luxemburg, one undoubtedly would have been told, Charlotta Scherin. During the past four years perhaps her mixture of German and French blood had been a disturbing inheritance.

Shortly after the passing of a portion of the American Army of Occupation through the little country, many were the rumors and talks of political changes and readjustments which would probably take place, but to these the small American Red Cross unit decided to give little heed.

One thing they were obliged to hear, the Grand Duchess Marie Adelaide had not pleased all her subjects by her surrender to German ideas and designs during the recent years when the German army had used her kingdom as a passageway to France.

In spite of her verbal protest against the breaking of the treaty which declared her country neutral, once the Germans had entered her duchy the Grand Duchess had appeared to sympathize with the invaders.

Now, whether it was the world talk of democracy, the victory of the allies, or the old love of the little duchy of Luxemburg for France, the

people of the small kingdom were assuredly considering a change of government.

Yet this problem did not trouble or affect the affairs of the Red Cross hospital. Nor did the little Countess Charlotta appear deeply interested, insisting that her family would make the same effort to compel her marriage without regard to political reforms.

Certainly the young Luxemburg countess, whatever her upbringing, was not a reserved character. Instead she seemed to love nothing so well as to discuss her own past, present and future with the group of American girls and to have them tell her as much as they would of their own histories.

One way or another apparently the Countess Charlotta was in the habit of managing to do what she liked.

The thing she wished at present was to remain as long as possible at the American Red Cross hospital.

It was true at first the two Red Cross physicians who had been her rescuers advised against her removal from the hospital. Influenced by them, or perhaps sharing their view, her own physician had given the same opinion. But now a number of days having passed without fresh complications, undoubtedly the Countess Charlotta might have returned home had she so desired.

Yet since she did not so desire and declined to stir from her bed, naturally Sonya felt obliged to insist upon her remaining until she had completely recovered.

The old house in which the Red Cross was now established Sonya had since learned was the property of the girl who was in a sense an accidental patient.

The Countess Charlotta was not a troublesome invalid, Sonya's chief difficulty being that the Red Cross girls so enjoyed the newcomer's society it was difficult to keep them out of her room during any of their spare moments.

Certainly she was brave and made as little as possible of her physical suffering, and then her insatiate curiosity about American girls was a charm in itself.

As a matter of fact it was Charlotta who soon knew more of the history of the present group of Red Cross girls than any one of their number had ever formerly known.

Both Mildred Thornton and Nona Davis told her of their own engagements, perhaps unwisely sympathizing with the difference in their own futures and hers.

Bianca Zoli spared nothing of her past save the betrayal of her country's secrets by her Italian mother, a fact to which she never alluded.

Sonya even discovered herself relating anecdotes of her own somewhat long and checkered career for the benefit of the newcomer who was at once the guest of the hospital and its hostess. She even spoke of her recent marriage to Dr. David Clark and the fact that his Red Cross unit would establish a hospital in one of the old castles on the Rhine as soon as the American Army of Occupation were in possession of Coblenz.

Ruth Carroll reported that she had not so interesting a story to tell as she knew the little countess would have liked to hear. Her life had been fairly prosaic; her father was a country doctor in a little Kentucky town and she had never left home until the interest in the war led her to study nursing and later to join the Red Cross service in France.

Regardless of Charlotta's openly expressed unbelief, Ruth insisted that never in her life, not even as a little girl, had she possessed a real admirer.

In compensation Ruth could only declare that if Theodosia Thompson cared to tell of her past it would form a contrast to her own humdrum tale.

It chanced that Bianca Zoli was also in the little countess's room when one evening after supper Theodosia dropped in to rest and talk before going upstairs to bed.

Her duties were over for the day and it seemed to both the other girls that she appeared tired and cross. Yet the work at the hospital at present was

not severe. Most of the American soldiers, who had suffered attacks of influenza on their eastward march, were now nearly well, while a few of them had already left the hospital at Luxemburg for one of the convalescent hospitals in southern France.

In their brief acquaintance Bianca and Charlotta had become intimate friends, for one reason because Bianca had more time to devote to her than the regular Red Cross nurses. But there was another strange bond in the difference in their temperaments, since concealment of her emotions was the habit of Bianca's life, while Charlotta apparently never concealed anything.

Yet Bianca was talking of Carlo Navara and their friendship when Theodosia interrupted her unconscious revelation of her affection for the young American soldier and singer.

"Perhaps you would rather I did not come in," Theodosia protested, standing a moment on the threshold and frowning.

Then, when both girls had insisted on her entrance, she came and sat down in a large chair with her small feet thrust under her.

Bianca was sitting on the edge of Charlotta's bed, both of them having been examining a box of jewelry which the young countess had demanded sent from her home earlier in the day.

The big room was very comfortable with a few pieces of old furniture which had not been removed from this chamber to give place to the regular hospital accommodations.

A shaded electric light was on a table near the bed throwing its warm lights on Bianca Zoli's fair hair and on the Countess Charlotta's black curls which she had tied with a band of bright blue velvet.

"You children look very young and very fortunate," Theodosia began, her tone a little envious.

"It must be agreeable, Countess Charlotta, not to be a Miss Nobody of Nowhere, even if you have difficulties of your own to contend with."

Theodosia made a queer little face, wrinkling her small nose, the dark light appearing in the centres of her large, pale blue eyes.

"I don't think I could make up my mind even in my present condition to marry a German nobleman, but a nobleman of another variety I think I would accept regardless of his age and the democratic ideas which are supposed to possess my country. As a matter of fact, I don't suppose any girls in the world ever wanted to marry into the nobility more than American girls before the war. I rather wonder if we have altogether changed. But at any rate I have nothing to offer to anybody, neither beauty, nor brains, nor money, nor family."

Then observing that both her companions appeared shocked by her pessimism Theodosia laughed, her expression changing with extraordinary swiftness.

"I wonder if you girls would like to hear a little of my history. I hope you won't be bored. After all it is only fair that we should know something of each other before we can form fair judgments. I wish I had the courage to confide in Mrs. Clark, but I don't think she likes me.

"I might as well tell the worst or the best of myself first. My mother was a dancer. I don't know much about her except that she was ill and came to a little Kentucky town to try to recover. My father was a boy, younger than she, and fell desperately in love. He married her without a cent and against the will of his older brother, a small farmer. Well, my mother died and my father died soon after when I was a few years old. Afterwards I was brought up by a very unpleasant old uncle of the story book variety, who disliked me and everything about me.

"I never had any friends except Ruth Carroll, who is an angel and has always been good to me. People in little towns are still suspicious of an ancestry like mine. I want to be a dancer myself, but I have never had the opportunity. So I studied nursing because Ruth was studying and because I wanted to help in the war and most of all, to get away from Cloverport, Kentucky.

"There is my history in a nutshell, but what is really interesting in life isn't the chapters one has already read, it is the chapters to come. I hope we

may soon go on to Coblenz. I am sure we will have an interesting time there. Only of course I am sorry, Countess Charlotta, that you will not be with us."

Older than her companions, Theodosia's dramatic Irish instinct was somewhat overwhelming. Even the little Luxemburg countess felt her own story of less interest and importance by comparison.

Fortunately Theodosia had also an Irish sense of humor and observing the awestruck expressions of her companions, suddenly she laughed a gay little laugh which was one of the attractions of her odd and not always pleasing personality.

"Oh, you must not take what I have just told you too seriously. Ruth Carroll, who understands me better than any one else, says I get more pleasure than sorrow out of my queer history. As for the dancing I only wish to do folk dancing and Mrs. Clark tells me the soldiers are beginning to be interested in folk dancing as one of the methods of amusing themselves. I told her how much I was interested and she told me there might be a chance to help entertain the soldiers as well as nurse them, after the army of occupation settles down for a long watch upon the Rhine. Goodnight," and even more quickly than she had appeared, Thea, as her friends called her, slipped out of the big chair and disappeared.

A few minutes later Bianca went her way to bed. She was wearing a small pin which the Countess Charlotta had given her, not only as a mark of her friendship, but for a secret reason which only the two girls were to know.

So it chanced that the group of Red Cross girls and the little Luxemburg countess became fairly well acquainted with each other's past histories because of the natural fondness of girls for confiding in one another. Only Nora Jamison never talked of herself, and though appearing perfectly friendly, seemed to devote all her spare time to the companionship of the little French girl, Louisa.

CHAPTER IX

"Life's Little Ironies"

ONE afternoon the Countess Charlotta was alone in her room walking up and down in a restless fashion for a girl who had been so recently injured. Her forehead was still bandaged and her arm in a plaster cast, but otherwise she was apparently well. Nevertheless, she showed the results of the strain of her accident and perhaps of her personal problem.

She looked older than one would have supposed from her half-joking and half-serious conversations with Bianca Zoli and the other Red Cross girls.

In spite of her natural gayety and the warmth and color of her nature, which she had inherited from her French ancestry, the girl faced a difficult future.

All her life it seemed to her she had been in opposition to her surroundings, throwing herself powerlessly against ideas and conditions she could not alter. Everything that belonged to the old German order of existence she had always hated. From the time of her babyhood her father had appeared to her as a narrow tyrant insisting that she should spend her days in a routine which pleased him, without consulting either her wishes or her talents. As a matter of fact, the small countess had a will of her own and resented dictation.

Never would the little Charlotta even in her earliest youth do what might naturally have been expected of her! From the first her wilfulness, her entire lack of interest in ladylike pursuits had been a source of trouble and anxiety to her governesses.

One characteristic of the small Charlotta was that she never seemed able to remain still long enough to learn the things which were required of her. Her one desire was to be outdoors riding on horseback over the fields, or

playing with the children in the village, or in the small cottages on her father's estate.

The dignity and importance of her own social position never seemed to enter Charlotta's mind, even after her family had devoted long hours to bringing the fact before her attention.

Reaching sixteen it had become her duty to play a small part in the little court of her cousin, the Grand Duchess. But although the court life was simple and far less formal than in countries of greater wealth and size than the little duchy of Luxemburg, nevertheless Charlotta found even the mild formalism irksome.

The real difficulty lay in the fact that the members of the Grand Duchess's court were Germans in thought, in ancestry and in their ideals.

Now the little Countess Charlotta faced a life when she must always remain surrounded with these same influences; influences that she hated and that had always repelled and antagonized her.

What matter if the Germans had failed in their war against freedom, if her own freedom was still denied her? Moreover, since the German failure her father appeared more than ever determined to force her marriage.

If the German nobility were in disgrace, if the men surrounding the Kaiser had fallen with their master from their high estate, at least the Count Scherin of Luxemburg was faithful to old principles. Luxemburg was a neutral state and there could be no interference with his personal ideas and designs.

Moreover, a few moments before the Countess Charlotta had received her father's ultimatum and had just concluded the reading of his note which demanded that she return home within the next thirty-six hours.

Well, she would be more sorry to say farewell to her friends than they would ever appreciate. Besides, she must go away from the Red Cross hospital without the inspiration and the aid she had hoped to receive from her contact with a group of American girls. How much she had hoped to learn from the example of their courage. Surely some of them must have broken away from family traditions in coming from their own homes into

foreign lands to nurse the wounded! And she had dreamed she might learn to follow their example.

But how quiet the house seemed at present. It was strange to recall that her accident had brought her to this house where her mother had lived as a girl, a house which had been a part of her inheritance from her mother, although she had rarely been inside it.

If only one of the Red Cross girls would come and talk with her. There was so little time left when this would be possible and she so dreaded her own society. What would she do when she returned to the old narrowness of her past existence with the eternal disagreements?

Never except when she was outdoors could Charlotta endure being alone.

For the first time since her accident the little countess was almost completely dressed in a brown costume which Bianca had with great difficulty adjusted over her injured arm.

Walking to her door Charlotta opened it, glancing out into the wide hall.

If she had thought to mention it to Mrs. Clark, she would surely have gained permission to wander over this floor of her mother's former home. As a matter of fact, she had not been inside the place for a number of years, as the property she had inherited from her mother was in the hands of a business agent.

Stepping out into the wide hall Charlotta started toward the front window which overlooked the grounds. In a moment, however, she saw that the space before the window was occupied by a wheeled chair and that an American officer was seated there letting the sunlight stream over him.

Undismayed Charlotta walked forward.

"You have been ill and are better, I am glad," she said simply.

She had a curious lack of self-consciousness and a friendliness which was very charming.

The young officer attempted to rise.

"Why, yes, I am better, thank you. I have been stupidly ill from an attack of influenza just as my men were on the march toward Germany and I should have given anything in the world to have been able to go along with them. However, I must not grumble. I am right again so you need not be afraid of me. We have been kept pretty well isolated from you. But won't you have this chair?"

The girl shook her head.

"You are very kind and you can be quite certain I am not afraid of you. Sit down again, I know you will refuse to confess it, but you do look pretty weak still. And there is nothing the matter with me. Oh, I have a few bruises and a broken arm, but after all they are not serious. I wonder now what I was actually trying to do when I flung myself off my horse. Have you ever been desperate enough not to care what happened to you?"

"But you don't mean, Countess Charlotta—"

"How do you know my name?" the girl answered quickly, as if wishing to forget what she had just confessed. "Are you not Major James Hersey, one of the youngest majors in the United States overseas service? I think I have been hearing a good deal of you from Bianca Zoli and the other Red Cross girls."

Major Jimmie Hersey colored through his pallor, according to his annoying boyish habit.

"Well, Countess Charlotta, surely *you* have not counted on remaining a mystery—not to the American soldiers who have been ill here in your house, your guests in a fashion. We have seldom had so romantic an experience as having a countess as a patient along with the American doughboys and in the selfsame hospital. But I really can't sit here and talk to you while you stand. At least you will let me bring you a chair?"

With a good deal of satisfaction Charlotta nodded her head, her hair showing even duskier in contrast with the white bandage over her forehead.

Talking to American girls she had found extraordinarily entertaining, but to talk to a young American officer might be even more agreeable. It certainly would be a novelty, as this youthful major was the first American

man with whom she had ever exchanged a word, save the two young American Red Cross physicians.

"I want to congratulate you on your victory," Charlotta added, when the chair had been secured and she had seated herself upon it in an entirely friendly and informal attitude. "Always my sympathies have been with the allies from the very first. You see my mother was French and I suppose I am like her. I believe French people have the love of freedom in their blood just as you Americans have."

"I say, I thought there was something unusual about you," Major Jimmie answered impetuously. "I really can't imagine your being even half German. But that is not very polite of me and anyhow your country is not German. I have been reading about Luxemburg. You were once a part of France and after the French revolution became one of the ten departments, known as the department of forests, the Forest Canton. Except for your Grand Ducal family you have never been German in sentiment."

The Countess Charlotta hummed the line of a popular version of the national anthem of Luxemburg at the present time.

"Prussians will we not become." Then as she could not help being confidential she added:

"But suppose, suppose you were going to be forced into a German marriage, what, what would you do? I hate it, hate it, and yet—"

"Well, nothing on earth would induce me to consider it," Major Jimmie answered, his brown eyes shining and his face a deeper crimson. "You must forgive me, but you know I can't see anything straight about Germany yet and the thought of a girl like you marrying one of the brutes,—but perhaps I ought not to say anything as we are strangers and I might be tempted into saying too much."

"You could not say too much," Charlotta returned encouragingly. "I wish you would give me your advice. If I had been a boy I would have run away and fought against Germany and been killed, or if I had not been killed perhaps my family would have cast me off. I am thinking of running away anyhow, only I don't know just where to go. Do you think I could get to America without being discovered? Perhaps I might dress as a soldier. You

see I can speak English and French and German. I had to learn languages as a child even when I hated studying and now I'm glad. Then you know I can ride and shoot pretty well. I don't know why my father ever consented to have me taught, save that it amused him a little to have me show the tastes he would have liked in a son."

Major Hersey felt himself growing a little confused, as if he were losing his sense of proportion. He was not much given to reading, but he remembered two delightful romances, one "A Lady of Quality," the other "The Prisoner of Zenda." Here he was finding the two stories melting into one in the person of the girl beside him. Well the situation was surprising even a little thrilling!

Yet Major Jimmie knew what his own ideals required of him.

"I am sorry, I am afraid I don't dare offer you advice. Haven't you some woman who is your friend to whom you could appeal? There is Mrs. Clark; I have been knowing her some time when I was in camp not far from her Red Cross hospital near Château-Thierry. Why not talk to her? Still, if I were you I would not try running away, certainly not to the United States. It is pretty far and you could never make it. Excuse me, but you know it is amusing to hear you talk of dressing as a soldier. I am afraid you would not get away with the disguise five minutes. Wonder if you have half an idea what a soldier has to undergo before he can get aboard a transport for home."

The young American officer laughed and then his expression grew serious.

"Please don't say a thing like that again, even in jest and please don't even think it. I know a girl who has been brought up as you have been thinks she knows something about the world, when in reality she knows nothing, anyhow, nothing that is ugly or real. I say, here comes Mrs. Clark now, why not ask her to help you?"

At this moment Sonya Clark was advancing down the hall to escort her patient, Major James Hersey, back to his own room.

A little surprised on discovering the intimacy of the conversation, which was undoubtedly taking place between the young officer and the girl who

had certainly not known each other half an hour before, Sonya stopped and looked toward them.

Then she smiled at the little picture they made together and came forward to join them.

CHAPTER X

The Talk with Sonya

"**B**UT, my dear child, surely you must see my position! The Red Cross unit of which I am a member has asked the hospitality of your country in order that we may care for a number of our ill soldiers until they are sufficiently recovered to be sent away. I am deeply sorry and troubled for you. But how can I show my appreciation of the courtesy—and I know our continued presence in Luxemburg has been an embarrassment—by a betrayal of confidence? It would be a betrayal if I were to aid you in getting away from your home and country without your father's knowledge. In a way it would not only be a personal discourtesy and deceit, there might even be international difficulties. You are related to the Grand Ducal family while I, well, very unimportant persons can make important difficulties these days! So I am afraid I must refuse what you ask. But surely if you speak plainly to your father and make him understand your feeling in the matter, he will not demand a sacrifice of your youth and happiness. Of course I don't know the laws or the customs of your country, but an enforced marriage these days appears as an impossibility."

"It is not a question of law or custom, Mrs. Clark; only in reigning families are marriages actually arranged," the Countess Charlotta answered. "Of course you know, however, that in Germany the consent of the parents to a marriage is almost essential, and my father is German born and was brought up in Germany, coming to Luxemburg when he was near middle age. But I am not trying to pretend to you that I am actually being forced into this marriage, since in the end in spite of my pretence of bravery it will be my own cowardice which will condemn me to it. I simply do not feel I can go on living at home with my father and aunt if I refuse my consent. All my life I have been a disappointment to them and the atmosphere of our existence has been one long disagreement with antagonism between us on every possible subject. You see I have a good deal of money in my own

right and the man my father wishes me to marry is an old friend of his, who has lost his fortune through the war. My father is very bitter over the result of the war, even if he may be forced to pretend otherwise. I think he wishes to give my fortune to his friend as much as he wishes to see me a proper German wife. But don't worry about me, Mrs. Clark, I *do* see your point of view and am sorry to have troubled you."

It was past the usual hour of bed-time in the Red Cross hospital and Sonya had come in to talk to the young Luxemburg countess on her way to her own room.

She got up now and began walking up and down, feeling worried and uncertain. The young countess's situation, her beauty and charm, made a deep appeal and yet she was powerless to do what she asked and help her to escape from her uncongenial environment.

The girl's suggestion had been singularly childlike. She wished to be allowed to go away from Luxemburg with the Red Cross girls secretly and to remain in hiding with them.

"I am not a useful person at present," she had pleaded, "I think because I have never wished to be, but as soon as my arm is well I am sure you will find, Mrs. Clark, that I can do a good many things that might be worth while. It would not be Red Cross work perhaps, but I could help with the translating, I suppose there may be a good deal of confusion of tongues when the army of occupation reaches the Rhine."

Sonya was thinking of this speech now as she watched the shadows in the old room, lighted only by a single lamp. A curious freak of circumstance that this same room had once been the Countess Charlotta's mother's.

"Do you think I might talk to your father? Would it do the least good? I suppose he would only think me extraordinarily impertinent?" Sonya queried.

In the years of her work with the Red Cross since the beginning of the war perhaps she had had a singular experience. Instead of finding as most women had, that she had given herself wholly and entirely to the needs of

the soldiers, it seemed to Sonya that the greatest and most important demands upon her had been made by the Red Cross girls.

Always it was young girls who came to her with their problems, their disappointments and difficulties. And sometimes the difficulties were associated with their work, but more often with their emotions. But then it seemed that love and war had always gone hand in hand, and at least the girls she had cared for had kept themselves free from unfortunate entanglements. The soldiers they had chosen for their friends were fine and generous. But with the little Luxemburg countess, Sonya felt it might be difficult to guess what her future might hold. She was wilful, beautiful and unhappy, with perhaps but few congenial friends among her former associates.

At this instant the Countess Charlotta shook her head, smiling.

"No, I don't think it would do any good for you to talk to my father, Mrs. Clark. As a matter of fact, it would make things more difficult for me to have him discover I have discussed my private affairs with a comparative stranger. I shall probably say goodbye to you tomorrow and go back home, but I want you to realize, Mrs. Clark, how much I have appreciated everybody's kindness to me here and how much I like and admire American girls. Indeed, I would not have added to your work if I had not been so anxious for their acquaintance. You will soon be going away from Luxemburg to join the American Army of Occupation on the Rhine. May I wish you all good fortune?"

The little countess held out her hand and Sonya took it in her own for a moment and then leaned over and kissed her.

"May I write you after we go away and tell you where we are to be stationed? Surely there could be no objection to this. And, my dear, some day I may be able to prove myself your friend, even if I am forced to seem unfriendly now. Goodnight."

And Sonya went away, curiously depressed.

In a few days the temporary Red Cross hospital in Luxemburg would close and she would probably never see the little Countess Charlotta again. The soldiers who had been ill were now sufficiently recovered either to

rejoin their regiments, by this time approaching the German frontier, or else to return to convalescent hospitals in France.

The reigning family of the little duchy of Luxemburg had been courteous but none too friendly, and personally Sonya was anxious to rejoin her husband and the remainder of their Red Cross unit and to find themselves established with the American Army of Occupation.

Gossip in Luxemburg at the present time insisted that the Grand Duchess Marie Adelaide would probably be deposed and her sister invited to reign in her place. Sonya was hoping to be away from the duchy before this occurred, and as this did not actually take place until early in January and it was now December, the American Red Cross unit had not to meet this political change.

Left to herself the little Countess Charlotta did not go immediately to bed, although Bianca Zoli had helped her to undress some time before and she now wore only her rose-colored velvet dressing gown over her night gown.

Until it was midnight and the big house had grown quiet she sat alone. Her future was at present no clearer before her than upon the day when in a spirit of utter recklessness and foolhardiness she had deliberately flung herself from her horse. Yet at least she would never be so stupid again or perhaps so wicked!

Finally getting up she lighted a candle and wandered first about the old room and then out into the wide hall.

She had an idea of going to Bianca Zoli's room and of asking Bianca if it were possible that she could make her a gift, an unusual gift perhaps. The little countess desired one of Bianca's cast-off Red Cross uniforms.

But then Bianca did not sleep alone and would certainly be startled by such an extraordinary request.

Moreover, Charlotta would have no reasonable explanation to offer for her request not being entirely clear in her own mind as to why she desired this possession.

Later she tiptoed back into her own room and climbed into bed.

Next day probably she would make her singular demand. If she had no such opportunity at some time, when the American Red Cross had departed from Luxemburg, she would come back to her own house, since there she might find what she wished.

If it became necessary and she did finally decide to leave home she would require some disguise which her friends might unwittingly leave behind them.

CHAPTER XI

The Journey to Coblenz

"I WANT a doughboy and not an officer to be first across that bridge."

This command from an American officer was issued one morning in December, just as the sun broke through the grey mist. A little later, the American Army of Occupation, which had been led to victory by General Pershing, crossed the Moselle river. Beyond lay Germany.

There was no loud cheering, no blare of bands, or signs of the conquering hero, when the American soldiers set foot on the land they had crossed the ocean to conquer, only before their eyes floating in the morning breeze were the stars and stripes.

The advanced guard continued the ascent over winding roads and past villages onward toward the Rhine. First marched the infantry, then followed the artillery, engineers, signal battalions and last the hospital units. And accompanying one of the final units was Sonya Clark and her Red Cross group.

Never were any of them to forget their journey into the city of Coblenz, which, situated midway between Mayence and Cologne, just where the Moselle flows into the Rhine, was to form the chief city for the American Army of Occupation.

As a matter of fact Sonya and her Red Cross unit had not dreamed of being able to form a part of the army on their first approach to the Rhine, believing that the time spent by them in Luxemburg would delay them too seriously. But, because the German army was slower in accomplishing its retreat than had been anticipated, the Third American Army did not draw near the city of Coblenz until the close of the second week of December.

It was Sunday when they started their victorious march from the French country, it was Sunday when they entered the valley of the Rhine.

Every acre of the valley appeared to be under cultivation; there were fields of winter wheat and walled vineyards lining the roads. Beyond, the hills were covered with dense forests, farther on were the tall summits of the ancient castles of the Rhine.

Varying impressions the journey into Germany made upon this particular group of American girls.

"I declare it is unendurable to me to see how prosperous and peaceful the German county appears in comparison with the French!" Nona Davis exclaimed, staring out of the window of their Red Cross automobile, as their car drove through one of the small towns not far from the larger city.

Not many grown persons were in sight, but children were swarming everywhere and blonde heads were sticking out of the windows of nearly all the little houses along the road.

"I don't think the children look nearly as hungry as we had been led to expect," she added with a bitterness of tone unlike Nona's usual attitude of mind. But then she had been nursing in Europe for four years, since the very outbreak of the war and had been an eyewitness to untold suffering and privation.

"I don't think I would be resentful about the German children, Miss Davis," Nora Jamison argued unexpectedly, as she rarely took part in any general conversation among the Red Cross girls.

Nona glanced in her direction. Sitting next Nora was the little French girl, Louisa, who had been in her care ever since their withdrawal from France. There had been no one along the way to whom they could entrust the child.

In the little French girl's expression at the moment there was something which seemed to Nona to justify her point of view. Her face was white and her lips trembling as she too gazed out at the little German village.

At the instant she had beheld a former German soldier walking along one of the streets. On his head was a round civilian cap and he had on a pair of civilian trousers, the rest of his costume was an old German uniform. And it was the sight of the uniform which had brought the terror to the child's face.

Sonya saw the look and understood it at the same moment. In order that there might be no further argument she said gently:

"Girls, I don't often preach, but perhaps I shall make the effort now. We are going into an extraordinary new experience for which I sometimes wonder if we are either mentally or spiritually prepared. During the past four years we have felt an intense bitterness against everything German; they represented for us all the forces of evil against which we were fighting. Now we are going to live among them and I suppose must not feel the same degree of hatred. Yet it will be difficult to change, impossible at first. I think it may be a number of years before we can learn to accept them as our friends. And yet I do not wish any of us to stir up fresh antagonism. One has always heard that the soldiers who have done the actual fighting have never the same hatred toward each other as the noncombatants, and perhaps we Red Cross workers stand somewhere in between the two. And yet Germany has only herself to thank that she has earned the distrust of the civilized world!"

As no one replied, after remaining silent a moment, Sonya went on: "You know our soldiers have been given the order that they are to be as polite as possible and not to make trouble, but also they are not to fraternize with the Germans, even if living in their homes. I think the same order holds good with us."

At this instant Bianca Zoli who had appeared to be almost asleep opened her eyes and yawned.

"But I thought fraternizing meant becoming like brothers," she remarked irritably. "I don't see how there is any danger of our becoming too brotherly with the Germans, Sonya."

The laugh at Bianca's speech, although annoying to her, helped to clear the atmosphere.

In truth at the time the Red Cross girls were weary and anxious to reach the end of their journey, in order that they might establish their Red Cross headquarters.

Bianca was in a particularly discouraged frame of mind. She was distinctly grieved at saying goodbye to the little Luxemburg countess, whom she happened to have liked more than any girl she had ever known; she also cherished a grievance against Sonya Clark, because Sonya had refused to consent to bring Charlotta away with them secretly.

Moreover, Bianca was anxious to have some word of Carlo Navara. Not a line, no news of any kind had she been able to receive since Carlo's regiment began its march toward the Rhine. And Bianca had never a very comfortable sense of Carlo's enduring friendship. It was only when she had been able to help Carlo in the past that he had seemed especially fond of her. She did not blame him particularly; he was a good deal older than she was, and his gift of a wonderful voice made other people spoil him, beside adding to his own vanity. He had once thought he would always care more for Sonya Clark than any one in the world, but Bianca had seen in the last weeks they were together in the hospital near Château-Thierry that Carlo was becoming far more reasonable upon this subject.

Sonya's marriage had of course made all the difference, although in his absurd fashion Carlo had protested that it could never alter his affection.

With a little sigh, Bianca now made an effort to go to sleep again.

She was not in the least interested in continuing to stare out the car window as the other girls were. She had been doing nothing else for days.

Whether she slept or not, Bianca did not realize. But suddenly she heard Sonya murmur.

"Don't go to sleep again, Bianca dear. We are just about to enter Coblenz and I want you to remember it all your life. See it is a splendid, prosperous city along the bank of the Rhine."

But Bianca would not rouse herself until their automobile had entered the centre of the city and gone by the Coblenzhof, one of the finest hotels in

the city, and then past the mammoth statue of Wilhelm I the grandfather of the deposed Kaiser.

Then Bianca decided to display a mild interest in her surroundings.

Coblenz is known as one of the most beautiful cities in the world and the German defeat had dimmed none of its outward glory.

Finally the Red Cross automobile drove to the outskirts of the city and entered a large court yard. On a hill beyond the courtyard rose an old castle which was to be the new American Red Cross hospital.

The building itself was grim and forbidding with its square, serrated towers and heavy, dark stone walls.

Bianca gave an instinctive shiver.

"The castle looks more like a dungeon than a hospital," she whispered to Sonya, "I wish they had given us a more cheerful place for our headquarters. Perhaps our soldiers will not mind, but I should hate to be ill in such a dismal place. Yes, I know the outlook over the Rhine is magnificent but just the same it depresses me."

Then Bianca's manner and expression changed.

Standing in the yard before the castle were a group of their friends waiting to receive them.

Dr. Clark had arrived in Coblenz a number of hours before his wife and had already taken command of the new Red Cross hospital for American soldiers. He and his wife had not seen each other in nearly a month, as they had made the journey to the Rhine with different portions of the army.

With Dr. Clark were other members of his Red Cross staff and several representatives of the German Red Cross, who were to turn over certain supplies.

Unexpectedly a private soldier formed one of the group, who must have received permission from his superior officer to share in the welcome to his friends.

The young man was Carlo Navara.

Bianca extended her hand like a child for Carlo to assist her out of the car.

"I was never so glad to see you before," she announced. "I don't care what the other Red Cross girls may say, but I have found the journey to the Rhine since we left Luxemburg extremely tiresome."

CHAPTER XII

New Year's Eve in Coblenz

THERE was no great difficulty in establishing the American Red Cross hospital at Coblenz. Dr. Clark had a large and efficient staff who were accustomed to working with him and naturally the demands were not so severe as in time of war.

Indeed Dr. Clark had no idea of asking the same degree of energy and devotion which the last six months of fighting had required of every human being in any way engaged in the great struggle in Europe. A reasonable amount of work and of discipline was as necessary for the hospital staff as for the soldiers and officers of the American Army of Occupation engaged in their new duty of policing the Rhine. Yet whenever it was possible opportunity was given for freedom and pleasure.

There were but few of the expected difficulties between the Americans and the Germans which the people of both nations had feared. A certain friction of course and suspicion and gossip about secret plots, but no open quarreling or dissension.

The new Red Cross hospital occupied an old castle which had formerly been used as a German hospital, although the last German wounded had been removed before the arrival of the American army.

The castle itself stood on a hill with a drop of a hundred feet to the bank of the Rhine, a path led down the hill to the river's edge. Crowning the summit were two old Roman towers which commanded a wonderful view; through the windows one could see many miles up and down the historic stream and on either side other castles famous in ancient legends long before the foundation of the modern German empire.

Within view of the American Red Cross hospital was the famous German fortress of Ehrenbreitstein across the river from Coblenz. The fortress was set on a rocky promontory four hundred feet above the river and surrounded by a hundred acres of land. From its flagstaff, where for a hundred years the German standard had waved, now floated the stars and stripes.

On New Year's day at about four o'clock in the afternoon Sonya Clark stood waiting just outside the hospital for the appearance of her husband. It had become their custom for the past two weeks, whenever there was no real reason to prevent, to take a walk every afternoon at about the same hour.

However, on this afternoon, Sonya and Dr. Clark had a definite destination.

A New Year's eve entertainment for the amusement of the soldiers was to take place at the Red Cross headquarters about a mile from the hospital and both Sonya and her husband had promised to be present. As a matter of fact as many of their Red Cross nurses as Miss Blackstone had been able to release from their duties had been spending the afternoon at the headquarters and an equal number of the hospital staff of physicians and orderlies.

A light snow was falling when Sonya and Dr. Clark set out. The court yard in front of their hospital sloped gradually to the road, so that the steep incline was only in the rear.

To her husband at least Sonya looked very young and handsome in her long fur coat and hat, which had been one of his gifts since reaching Europe.

Their walk was to lead through a number of quiet streets and then along one of the main thoroughfares of the German city.

At first Sonya and Dr. Clark spoke of nothing of any importance and then finally walked on for several moments in silence.

At the end of this time, Sonya glanced toward her husband and smiled.

"What is it you wish to talk to me about?" she inquired. "I don't know why, but I always seem able to feel a something in the atmosphere when you have a problem on your mind which you can't quite decide to discuss with me."

Dr. Clark laughed.

"Well, you see, Sonya, when I married you I was under the impression that you were unsuited to Red Cross work and that so far as possible, since you would insist upon working with me, you must be saved from as many difficulties as possible. At present, although I have not yet quite reached the state of advising with you upon my professional responsibilities, when my problems are human, you are the only person to whom I can turn. Miss Blackstone is an admirable superintendent of a hospital along the same lines that I have been a fairly successful physician and surgeon, but when we have to deal with personal equations we are both hopelessly unfit."

"And all this long speech, which may or may not be complimentary, leads up to just what human equation at present?" Sonya queried.

"Can't you guess and tell me first, Sonya?" Dr. Clark demanded. "I always feel so much better satisfied if you have noticed certain situations yourself before I speak to you of them. Then I am convinced that I have not made a mistake in my own sometimes faulty observations."

"I suppose at this instant you are considering the problem of Hugh Raymond and Thea Thompson, aren't you, if problem there is in which any outside human being has a right to interfere? No, don't interrupt me until I finish," Sonya protested.

"I realize that you are very seriously opposed to the least personal relation existing between any of your Red Cross nurses and physicians and so far we have been remarkably successful. But it has been more luck I think than my distinguished husband's objection to the possibility. One can't arrange, when young persons are more or less intimately associated with each other and living under the same roof, that they always maintain a friendly and yet highly impersonal attitude. Of course I also understand that you have great hopes for Hugh Raymond's future, and that as he is extremely poor you would dislike to see him marry a poor girl before his position is more assured. I also understand that neither you nor I especially like Thea Thompson. She has rather a curious history and is not herself an ordinary person. One thing I have noticed. At the beginning of their acquaintance it was Thea who made an effort to interest Hugh, since then I don't think she has been particularly interested in him. The interest has been on his side. It is to me rather unfortunate because Ruth Carroll might have

liked Hugh, and, oh well, I must not speak of this! All I wished to say was that whatever our personal feeling in the matter it will be wiser, my dear husband, for you to say nothing to Hugh at present and for me to say nothing to Thea, which is what you rather had in mind to suggest. Moreover, nothing has so far developed between them for which you need have cause to worry! Thea told me the other day that she was happy here in Coblenz because she has been able to have a relief from the constant strain of the hospital work, which she confesses was becoming a little hard to endure, by dancing with the soldiers at the Red Cross headquarters in her free hours. She has been helping one of the Red Cross managers, a Mrs. Adams, to teach some of the soldiers folk dancing. I believe she has a gift for it and the soldiers are getting a good deal of amusement out of their own efforts to learn. A good thing for all of them! We must remember our years and realize that young people need all kinds of relaxation."

"Thanks, Sonya, for including me along with your youthful self, even if we are in a class apart," Dr. Clark returned. "I wonder if you will be as severe with me concerning my other complaint. As a matter of fact I am ashamed of this myself and do not honestly consider it gravely. But you know we are in a curious position here in Coblenz. On the outside apparently everything is going well. As comfortable a relation as one could expect has been established between our former enemy and ourselves. Yet Coblenz is full of rumors. There is a very strong pro-Kaiser element in the city, which means there is a party deeply in opposition to all American thought and feeling and to the establishment of any new form of government in Germany which shall not include the Kaiser.

"The point of all this is that I insist there be no display even of conventional friendliness between any member of our Red Cross unit and a single German resident of Coblenz. The information has been brought to me that Nora Jamison, one of our own nurses, has been making friends with a group of German children. They meet her and the little French girl, Louisa, in one of the city parks every afternoon and there they play together. Of course, this appears innocent, but knowing the children in a too friendly fashion may mean knowing their families later. The army officers tell me there has been this same problem among our soldiers. No one seems to have been able to prevent their getting on intimate terms with every little Hans and Gretel who makes their acquaintance. But I do wish you would

protest mildly to Miss Jamison. It is true that we know little of her history except that her credentials must have been satisfactory to the Red Cross. I confess I agreed to have her form a part of our Red Cross unit rather on an impulse, when I learned Barbara Thornton was forced to return home. Besides, Miss Jamison herself attracted me. She has some unusual characteristic which I cannot exactly explain, but which nevertheless—"

"Ah, well, you need not try to explain it, David, because the thing is 'charm,' which I believe no one has successfully explained so far," Sonya answered. "I presume this same charm is what endears her to the German children; it has kept the little French Louisa close beside her since we left France. The little girl is getting all right too, talking and behaving like a normal person. But of course I'll ask Miss Jamison to be careful that her friendship with the German children does not lead to any intimacy in their homes. She told me that she was a kind of Pied Piper of Hamelin. Do you remember how the Pied Piper led the German children away into some undiscovered country when their parents refused to pay him his just dues? But I think the girl is Peter Pan instead and has some childish quality which we cannot understand but which children recognize and love in her. You see the young soldier to whom she was engaged was killed in the fighting near Château-Thierry and apparently children are her one consolation. She is friendly with all our Red Cross unit, but not intimate with one of us."

When Sonya and her husband finally reached the Red Cross headquarters, already the large building was lighted, as the darkness fell early in the winter afternoons.

Going unannounced into the big reception room they found it fairly crowded. The room must have been fifty feet in length and nearly equally wide and extended from the front of the building to the rear.

In one end was a giant Christmas tree, left over from the Christmas celebration for the soldiers which in honor of New Year's eve was again lighted with a hundred white candles according to a German custom.

There were few other lights in the room.

Up against the walls were double rows of chairs in which a number of persons were seated. Others were dancing in the centre of the floor.

Immediately Mrs. Arthur Adams, who was in charge of the Red Cross headquarters, came forward to speak to Dr. and Mrs. Clark. She was accompanied by Major James Hersey, who had entirely recovered from his attack of influenza and was now in command of his battalion in Coblenz.

A little later, after they had secured chairs, Bianca Zoli and Dr. Raymond joined them.

Nona Davis was dancing with Sergeant Donald Hackett, Thea Thompson with Carlo Navara.

Sonya noticed no one else at the moment whom she knew particularly well.

Yes, there standing up against the wall was Nora Jamison, with the little French girl's hand in hers and a line of children on either side.

Nona Davis changing partners, Sergeant Donald Hackett went over evidently to ask Nora Jamison to dance with him, but she must have declined as he continued standing beside her, laughing and talking.

"Have you been dancing, Bianca?" Sonya inquired. "You usually enjoy it so much."

Leaning over, Bianca whispered.

"Please don't discuss the question aloud, Sonya. No one has asked me recently, only Major Hersey and Dr. Raymond earlier in the afternoon. Dr. Raymond dances abominably."

"Not Carlo?" Sonya demanded.

And Bianca shook her head.

Something of their whispered conversation Hugh Raymond must have guessed.

"We are not to have any more of the ordinary dancing just at present, Mrs. Clark. Miss Thompson and Carlo Navara are to do a folk dance together."

Just as he was speaking, suddenly the music ceased and the dancers crowded into places along the wall.

A few moments later, standing in the centre of the floor and alone, were Thea Thompson and Carlo Navara.

This afternoon Thea did not look plain; she had on a simple black dress of some thin material, a bright sash and black slippers and stockings. Her red hair formed a brilliant spot of color.

Carlo was in uniform.

Their dance was probably an Irish folk dance, although it was comparatively simple yet the effect was charming.

Sonya believed she had never seen two more graceful persons than Thea and Carlo as they advanced toward each other and receded, later forming an arch with their hands above their heads and circling slowly in and out.

Sonya had known nothing of Carlo as more than an ordinary dancer, but evidently he and Thea must have been practicing together for the afternoon's entertainment. Naturally, Carlo's musical gifts would make him a more successful dancer than anyone without a sense of rhythm and time.

In any case the effect was charming and the applause at the close enthusiastic.

As soon as the dance was ended, Carlo came directly over to where Sonya and her husband were seated. Bianca and Dr. Raymond were standing close beside them.

"Carlo, you have not asked Bianca to dance, you won't forget, will you?" Sonya murmured as soon as she had the opportunity without being overheard. "I am afraid you have hurt her, but please don't let her guess I have spoken to you."

Carlo flushed slightly.

"I am sorry my dear lady," he returned, which had been one of his old time titles for Sonya. "I am afraid I have neglected Bianca. Miss Thompson is such a wonderful dancer, she is apt to make one forget any other partner."

But although Sonya smiled upon Carlo and forgave him, declining the honor of dancing herself, Bianca was not to be appeased.

"I suppose Sonya asked you to invite me to dance, since you waited until she arrived before you thought of me. Thank you just the same but I'd rather not," Bianca said later in answer to his invitation.

Afterwards, although Carlo pleaded for her favor and returned several times with a fresh request, nevertheless Bianca continued firm.

Then, a few moments before going back to the hospital with Sonya and Dr. Clark, she waltzed for a short time with Dr. Raymond, in spite of the fact that she had been right in declaring that he was a conspicuously poor dancer.

CHAPTER XIII

A Walk Along the River Bank

SOME time later Bianca and Carlo Navara, not having seen each other alone since New Year's eve, left the hospital early in the afternoon for a walk together.

As a matter of fact Carlo's conscience had not been altogether easy concerning his neglect of Bianca since their days together at Château-Thierry. And certainly before those days he had reason to be grateful to Bianca and fond of her as well! Moreover, a little private talk with Sonya on this same subject, when Sonya had not spared his vanity, had quickened his resolution. Curious, Sonya had said, that the artist so seldom considers loyalty an essential trait of his own character when he demands so much loyalty from others! And yet one knows that without loyalty no human character has any real value!

Yet Carlo was not thinking of these ideas in detail when he and Bianca started out.

It was a February day with the faintest suggestion of spring in the damp, cold air.

Nevertheless, Bianca herself had chosen that they walk along the river bank, following a path until they reached the promenade which extended along a portion of the Rhine at Coblenz like the famous board walk of Atlantic City.

Holding tight to Carlo's hand, they slipped down the hill from behind the hospital until reaching this path.

But once on fairly level ground, Bianca deliberately removed her hand from her companion's and began walking sedately beside him several feet away.

"Why not walk as we have many times with my hand in your's to keep you from slipping, Bianca?" Carlo inquired with a teasing inflection in his voice and manner. "I thought you and I were kind of brother and sister. I don't want you sliding off into the water."

As Bianca made no answer, Carlo turned from her to look out over the river. Today the water was dark and muddy with a strong current flowing.

"Bianca," Carlo asked, "have you ever read the story of the Rheingold in the Ring of the Nibelung? One has had a horror of Germany for so long that one has preferred to forget German music. Yet since we arrived in Germany I have been reading the legends of the Rheingold and they seem to me to predict Germany's overthrow because of her materialism.

"Since to me Gold is the only God, and Gold alone
The idol that I worship, from all worlds
Will I drive out all love and loving-kindness
That to all other men there be no other God
But Gold, and Gold alone shall all men serve."

Carlo sang these few lines softly, forgetting his companion for the moment. Then he added half talking to her and half thinking aloud.

"I wonder if some day, I, the son of Italian parents, shall ever sing German music, if my hatred of Germany and antagonism to everything else that is German will allow me even to be willing to sing it. And yet I suppose there is no great tenor who has not at some time in his life longed to take the part of Siegfried, 'The curse can touch him not for he is pure, Love shineth on him and he knows not fear.'"

Carlo ceased speaking at last and in response Bianca gave a little sigh and then murmured.

"I wonder, Carlo, if you will ever learn to think or talk of any one except yourself?"

Bianca's reply was so unexpected that Carlo started and then stared at her, aggrieved and slightly irritated.

"But, Bianca, I thought that we were such intimate friends that I could talk to you about myself, and certainly of my musical ambitions. I am sorry my vanity has bored you."

The young girl shook her head.

"All persons possessed of any genius are supposed to be vain, aren't they, Carlo? I have known no other than you. But as for our being intimate friends, why, I do not feel that we are intimate friends any longer. After all, Carlo, I cannot give all the affection and it seems to me that is what you expect. When we first knew each other and I wanted to help you because I understood that you cared for Sonya in a way which she could not return, and afterwards when you were wounded and I tried to find you in Château-Thierry, I did not think or care, besides Sonya was Sonya! But now things are different."

For a few seconds Carlo studied the little cold, pure profile of the girl beside him. One had a habit of forgetting that Bianca was approaching eighteen, and then suddenly in some unexpected fashion she reminded you that she was by no means a child.

"I suppose you are referring to my friendship with Miss Thompson since our arrival in Coblenz, Bianca, or if not to our friendship at least to the fact that we have been dancing together nearly every afternoon when we both have leave. Can't you understand, Bianca, that it is sometimes pretty dull for one here in Coblenz now the excitement and thrill of the struggle for the allied victory is past? And now and then it seems to me I can scarcely endure waiting to return to the United States and begin to work again on my music. And yet one must prove as good a soldier at one time as another. Yet what is the harm in my amusing myself? I have thought Sonya also appeared disapproving of late. Miss Thompson is not only an extraordinary dancer, but she is most agreeable and——"

At this instant, having come to the end of the muddy path, Carlo and Bianca had reached the wide board walk which extended for some distance along the river. This afternoon it was as crowded with people as if Coblenz were enjoying a holiday instead of being a city occupied by a conquering army.

Observing his commanding officer, Major James Hersey, approaching, accompanied by Sergeant Donald Hackett, Carlo saluted and stood at attention. When they had gone past he turned once more to Bianca, his slight attack of bad temper having vanished.

"Not jealous, are you, Bee? You must realize that whatever friendships I may make, I shall always be fond of you."

If Carlo had been noticing his companion at this moment, he would have seen that Bianca flushed warmly at his condescension, and that she was extremely angry, and few people ever saw Bianca angry, not perhaps because she did not feel the emotion of anger, but because she possessed a rather remarkable self control.

"I don't think we will discuss the question of my being jealous, Carlo, you have scarcely the right to believe that I care for you enough for any such absurdity. I don't like Miss Thompson very much and neither does Sonya. Oh, there is no real reason for disliking her! But if you are under the impression that she likes you specially, Carlo, I think you are mistaken. She just likes to amuse herself too, and of course there is no harm in it."

Bianca's speech sounded perfectly childlike and yet perhaps she had a good deal of instinctive cleverness.

In any case Carlo felt annoyed.

"But suppose we don't talk personalities any more, Carlo," Bianca apologized almost immediately. "Naturally we can't always like the same people. I have never been able to get over my disappointment because the Countess Charlotta was not allowed to come with us to Coblenz. Sonya and I have nearly quarreled about her half a dozen times. And I suppose it is not alone that I am sorry for the Countess Charlotta, but because I do need a girl friend so dreadfully, Carlo. It seems strange doesn't it, and I am almost ashamed to speak of it, but I have never had a really intimate girl friend in my life. I suppose this may be partly due to the queer circumstances of my life. You see with my father dead and my mother an Italian peasant, who wished to make my life so different from her own that I was not allowed to associate even with her very closely, and then being brought up by a foster mother who did not encourage other girls to make friends with me, because

she might have to tell them of my peculiar history, I suppose I did not have much of a chance for friendships with the kind of girls I would like to have known! Then I realize that I have not a very attractive disposition."

Bianca's little unconscious confession of loneliness had its instantaneous effect upon her companion.

"Don't be a goose, Bianca mia," Carlo answered, using an Italian phrase which he sometimes employed, recalling the bond of their first meeting in Italy several years before. "But who is this Countess Charlotta whom you desire to have with you here in Coblenz in order that you may continue your friendship?"

Just an instant Bianca appeared troubled and then her expression cleared.

"Perhaps I should not have spoken of the Countess Charlotta, not even to you, Carlo, only of course I know I can trust you. She was a young girl who was ill in our temporary hospital in Luxemburg. I thought of course she would write me, as she promised to write when we said goodby. But I have never had a line from her and neither has Sonya although Sonya and I have both written her since our arrival in Coblenz. I am afraid something must have occurred to prevent her writing and so I have been uneasy."

Bianca's speech was not especially clear, nevertheless Carlo listened sympathetically and asked no embarrassing questions.

A little time after they entered the famous Coblenzhof where Bianca had been invited to have tea.

It was crowded with people and looked like Sherry's on a Saturday afternoon.

Both Carlo and Bianca gazed around them in amazement.

The people were all comfortably, some of them almost handsomely dressed, even if with little taste, but this was usual in Germany. They were drinking coffee and eating little oatmeal cakes and appeared contented and serene, even without their famous "Deutsche kuchen."

"I sometimes wonder, Carlo," Bianca whispered, when they were seated at a small table in a corner, "if some of these people are not glad after all

that the Kaiser has been defeated and that they are to have a new form of government and more personal freedom? They certainly seem to be glad the fighting is over. I suppose they had grown deadly tired of it and of being deceived by their leaders."

Carlo shook his head warningly.

"Be careful, Bianca. In spite of what you think there are still thousands of people in Coblenz faithful both to the Kaiser and his principles. Some of them may seem friendly to us, but the greater number are sullen and suspicious, regardless of the order that they are to appear as friendly as possible to our American troops. Yet somehow one can't help feeling as if there were plots against us of which we know nothing, just as there was in every allied country before the beginning of the war."

Carlo smiled.

"Here I am saying the very character of thing I asked you not to speak of, Bianca! By the way, do you suppose we know any people here? Let us look around and see."

CHAPTER XIV

Major James Hersey

ARRANGEMENTS had been made in Coblenz for the quartering of the officers of the American Army of Occupation in certain German homes, payment being made in an ordinary business fashion.

On arriving in Coblenz, after his illness in Luxemburg, Major Jimmie Hersey discovered that especially comfortable accommodations had been prepared for him. Also he was to have as his companion, a personal friend, Sergeant Donald Hackett an exception being made to the sergeant's living in the same house with his commanding officer.

The household in which the two young Americans were located was one of the many households at this time in Germany whose state of mind it would have been difficult for any outsider to have understood or explained.

The head of the family, Colonel Otto Liedermann, was an old man, now past seventy, who had once been a member of the Kaiser's own guard. His son, Captain Ludwig Liedermann had been seriously wounded six months before the close of the war, and, although at present in his own home, was still said to be too ill to leave his apartment. There was one grown daughter, Hedwig, who must have been a little over twenty years of age. The second wife, Frau Liedermann, was much younger than her husband, and her children were two charming little girls, Freia and Gretchen, who were but six and eight years old.

Outwardly the German family was apparently hospitably disposed to their enemy guests, although they made no pretence of too great friendliness. They saw that the Americans were cared for, that their food was well cooked and served. Yet only the two little girls, Freia and Gretchen, possessed of no bitter memories, were disposed to be really friendly.

And in boyish, American fashion, the two young officers, who were slightly embarrassed by living among a family with whom they had so lately been at war, returned the attitude of admiration and cordiality of the little German maids.

Freia was a slender, grave little girl with sunshiny hair and large, soft blue eyes, and Gretchen like her, only smaller and stouter with two little yellow pigtails, and dimples, in her pink cheeks.

One afternoon Major Jimmie Hersey was sitting alone in a small parlor devoted to his private use and staring at a picture on the mantel.

His work for the day was over, the drill hour was past and the soldiers, save those on special leave, had returned to their barracks.

One could scarcely have said that the young American officer was homesick, for there is something really more desolate than this misfortune. He was without a home anywhere in the world for which he could be lonely. An only son, his mother had died when he had been six months in France.

It was true that he had a sister to whom he was warmly attached, but she had married since her brother's departure for Europe, and for this reason he did not feel as if she belonged to him in the old fashion of the past.

At the moment he was looking at his mother's photograph and thinking of their happy times together when he was a boy. In spite of his present youthful appearance Major James Hersey regarded himself as extremely elderly, what with the experiences of the past years of war in France and his own personal loss, and the fact that he was approaching twenty-five.

Then from thinking of his mother, Jimmie, whose title never concerned him save when he was commanding his men, suddenly bethought himself of the young Countess Charlotta. It was odd how often he recalled a mental picture of her, when they had met but once. He had seen her again, however, on the morning when she had left the hospital at Luxemburg. Then he had watched from a window the carriage which drove her away.

Somehow the young Countess Charlotta in spite of her different surroundings, had struck him as being as lonely as he was.

Then Major Jimmie smiled, realizing that he was growing sentimental. Yet the girl's story had been a romantic one and she had confided in him so frankly. After all, one does enjoy being sorry for oneself now and then!

The young officer at this instant was disturbed in his meditations by hearing a little sound beside him.

Glancing around he beheld Gretchen, the youngest daughter of the German house. This was the first time since his arrival in her home that he had ever seen the small girl without Freia, her two years older and wiser sister.

Plainly enough by her expression Gretchen showed that she resented this misfortune. There were tears in her large light eyes and her little button of a nose was noticeably pink.

"What is it, baby?" the young officer demanded, his sympathy immediately aroused and glad also to be diverted from his own train of thought.

"It is that Freia has been allowed to go to play this afternoon with the lady from the Red Cross and the little French girl and that I must stay at home," the little girl lamented, speaking in German that her listener could readily understand. Major Hersey had studied German at school as a boy and during the last few weeks of residence in Germany had been surprised by recalling more of his German vocabulary than he had dreamed of knowing.

"Freia would like to bring Fraulein Fraulein Jamisen home with her only she will not come." Gretchen sighed, although beginning already to feel more comfortable.

It was warmer in her Major's room than in any portion of their large house; a small wood fire was burning in his grate. The little girl grew disposed toward further confidences.

"People come to our home all the time to see my brother, but Freia and I are never allowed in the room, only my father. Then they whisper together so we may not hear."

Major Hersey smiled; Gretchen was a born gossip, even in her babyhood, already he had observed that she deeply enjoyed recounting the histories of her family and friends, more especially what Gretchen unconsciously must have regarded as their weaknesses.

"But your brother, Captain Liedermann, is ill, perhaps it is natural that he does not wish a little chatterbox about him all the time. If I had been confined to my bed for as many months as he has, why I should have turned into a great bear. One day you would have come in to speak to me, Gretchen, and then you would have heard a low growl and two arms would have gone around you and hugged you like this," and Major Hersey suited his action to his words.

After a little squeak half of delight and half of fear, Gretchen settled herself more comfortably in her companion's lap.

However, she was not to be deterred from continuing her own line of conversation.

In the years to come, Major Jimmie had a vision of this same little German girl, grown older and stouter, her yellow pigtails bound round her wide head, sitting beside just such a fireside as his own and talking on and on of her own little interests and concerns, forever contented if her hearer would only pretend to listen.

For the sake of the listener of the future Jimmie hoped that the small Gretchen would continue to have the same soothing effect that she was at present producing upon him.

"My brother is not always in bed," Gretchen protested. "Now and then when he thinks he is alone, and I am only peeping in at the door, he climbs out of bed and walks about his room. One day one of his friends was in the room with him and when he got up and stamped about they both laughed."

"Oh, well, any fellow would laugh if he was growing strong again after a long illness," Major Hersey answered a little sleepily, realizing that Gretchen really required no comment on his part.

"Besides, you must be mistaken, your mother told me that Captain Liedermann had not been so well of late, nothing serious, a little infection

in a wound he had believed healed. As for guests who come frequently to your brother's room, why I never knew so quiet a household as your's, *kleines Madchen!* During the many hours I am here in this sitting-room, no one ever rings the front door bell or passes my door."

As a matter of fact Major Hersey's sitting-room was upon the first floor of the house and near its entrance. Formerly his room must have been either a small study or reception room, as the large drawing-rooms were across the hall. But these were never in use at the present time and kept always darkened, as a household symbol that all gayety and pleasure had vanished from the homes of Germany.

It occurred to Jimmie Hersey at this instant to wonder if Hedwig Liedermann had no friends. She was a handsome girl with light brown hair and eyes and a gentle manner. Surely there must be some young German officer in Coblenz who regarded her with favor! But if this were true he had never appeared at her home at any hour when Major Hersey had caught sight of him. It would not be difficult to recognize a German officer, even if he should be wearing civilian clothes.

Besides why did Fraulein Liedermann not entertain her girl friends in the drawing-rooms of her home? These rooms must have been used for social purposes before the war, as the position of Colonel Liedermann's family in Coblenz was of almost equal importance with the German nobility.

"Oh, no one comes to call upon us at the front door any longer," Gretchen added amiably. "You see you are an American officer and use this door and our friends do not wish to see you. They do not seem to like you."

"They—they don't," Major Hersey thought other things to himself, although naturally, in view of his audience, saying nothing unpleasant aloud.

How stupid he was not to have guessed what the smallest daughter of the house had just related! After all one could understand, the German viewpoint since in spite of having been told to love our enemies, how few of us have accomplished it?

It could not be agreeable to the defeated officers and soldiers of the conquered German army to enter the homes of their friends and find them

occupied by the victors.

"Better run away now, Gretchen, it must be getting near your tea-time," the American officer suggested, the little girl having occasioned an unpleasant train of thought by her final chatter.

But before Gretchen, who was not disposed to hurry, had departed, they were both startled by the sudden ringing of the front door bell, the bell whose silence they had been discussing, then they heard the noise of people outside.

A little later, one of the maids having opened the door, Gretchen and Major Hersey recognized familiar voices in the hall.

The same instant Gretchen escaped.

Then followed a cry from Frau Liedermann, and Sergeant Hackett's voice and another voice replying.

Major Hersey, unable to guess what had taken place, and anxious, joined the little group outside his door.

In his arms Sergeant Hackett was carrying Freia. It was apparent that the little girl must have fallen and hurt herself, yet evidently her injury was not serious. They were accompanied by Nora Jamison and the little French girl, Louisa.

"I am so sorry, Frau Liedermann, a number of children were playing in the park and Freia must have fallen among some stones. She was so frightened I thought it best to come home with her and we had the good fortune to meet Sergeant Hackett along the way. I don't think you will find there is anything serious the matter; I am sorry if we have alarmed you. I must return now to the hospital."

At this moment unexpectedly Frau Liedermann began to weep. She was a little like a grown-up Gretchen, and one felt instinctively that she was out of place in her husband's household. He was a stern and gloomy old man, possibly too proud to reveal to strangers how bitterly angered he was by the German defeat and the disgrace of his former emperor.

But Freia, whose name came to her from the legendary German goddess, who represented "Life and light and laughter and love," was the adored child of the family and particularly of the little mother to whom she was "her wonder child."

"But you will stay and see if Freia is seriously hurt? You are a Red Cross nurse and must know better than I," Frau Liedermann pleaded. "Freia has so often said that she wished to have us meet, but you would not come to our home and I could not go to you at your American Red Cross hospital. Can the war not be over among us women at least? I have relatives, brothers and sisters in America from whom I have not heard in four years. Yet my husband thinks I am not a true German because I wish to be happy and make friends again with our former foes."

Just for a fraction of a second Nora Jamison's eyelids were lowered and her face changed color. Was it possible that she did not desire to forgive and forget as the little German frau appeared to wish? Was there not a grave near Château-Thierry and a memory which must forever divide them?

And yet of course one did not wish to be unkind.

"Please stay just a minute," Freia pleaded.

The following moment Major Hersey watched the little procession climbing the stairs to the second floor of the house where the family were living at present. First Frau Liedermann led the way, then Freia walking, but holding close to Miss Jamison's hand, Gretchen and Louisa just behind them.

Afterwards Major Hersey was glad to have been a witness to this first introduction of Nora Jamison, into the German household.

CHAPTER XV

A Re-Entrance

ON this same evening Major Hersey and Sergeant Hackett were sitting before the same fire, shortly after dinner. They were talking in an idle fashion, neither of them particularly interested. Both would be pleased when the evening was over and they were in bed. Major Hersey had given his orders to his sergeant for the following day and then had suggested that he sit with him for a time longer.

The days were not difficult in Coblenz where one had many duties and interests, besides the association with one's fellow soldiers and a few other friends. But unless one went constantly to the German restaurants and theatres and movies, one could not find sufficient entertainment in the various Y. M. C. A. and Red Cross headquarters to occupy every evening of the week.

It was a brilliant winter night and the young men had left the curtains of the window open and the blinds unclosed so that the early moonlight shone into the room.

Therefore both of them noticed a soldier-messenger march down the street from the corner and enter the front yard of the house where they were living.

In answer to a command from his superior officer, Sergeant Hackett met the messenger at the front door. The soldier bore a note which was addressed to Major Hersey. The note requested that Major Hersey come at once to the headquarters of his Colonel.

There was no explanation as to why his presence had become suddenly necessary. However, without any particular emotion either of interest or curiosity, Major Hersey at once set out.

The streets were fairly deserted. The citizens of Coblenz were living under military law and, although the laws were not severe, two demands were made upon them, one that no arms or ammunition of any kind remain in the possession of any German, the second that they be inside their own homes at a certain hour each night.

This hour had not arrived and yet there were not many persons about, a few groups of American soldiers on leave, but scarcely any Germans.

The house of Colonel Winfield was at no great distance away.

"Most extraordinary thing, Hersey!" the Colonel was soon explaining, "you might guess for a dozen years why I have sent for you and never hit the correct answer. Don't look so mystified over my words. I have not sent for you to give you any military command, or to ask your advice on military matters, as I have now and then in spite of your being too youthful for the title you have been lucky enough to earn. I have sent for you because tonight you and I may regard ourselves as characters in a play. In a short time I hope to introduce the heroine."

Colonel Winfield was an elderly man a good deal past fifty, with closely cropped grey hair, small twinkling blue eyes under heavy brows and a mouth which could be extremely stern when the occasion demanded and equally humorous under opposite conditions.

Tonight he was seated in a large, handsome room, a little too elaborately furnished after German ideas of luxury, and before a wide table covered with books and old American newspapers and magazines.

Major Hersey could only stare at him in amazement, and with a total lack of comprehension.

"I might as well explain to you your part in the drama, Hersey. You haven't at present a very fortunate role, although I cannot tell how it may develop. The facts are that two women, or I should say one woman and a girl, arrived in Coblenz this afternoon without satisfactory passports. They were detained by one of our officers and because of something or other in their story, perhaps because of their appearance and manner, the circumstances were reported to me. I believe the young woman knew my name and requested that she be allowed to speak to me. I was busy and only saw her and her companion a few moments ago. Then she asked that I send for you and for Mrs. David Clark, saying you would both be able to identify her. Most extraordinary story she related, I find it difficult either to believe or disbelieve!" And Colonel Winfield leaned back in his chair studying the younger officer's face.

If he expected to find any clue to his puzzle in Major Jimmie's expression at this instant he was disappointed. The younger man was nonplused.

A woman and a girl who had arrived in Coblenz insisting that he could identify them! Why, he knew no woman or girl in the world who would be apt to make so unexpected an appearance! And yet for a few seconds the names of several girls he had known in the United States in the past who might possibly have come to Coblenz to work among the soldiers flashed before his mental vision.

"Suppose you see the two strangers at once, Jimmie, I don't feel that I have been polite in forcing them to wait here for me as long as they have waited, but I was unavoidably detained. They are in a little reception room across the way. I'll ask them to come here and speak to you as this room is larger and more agreeable."

"Don't you think, Colonel, we might postpone the interview until the arrival of Mrs. David Clark? Surely the women would find it more agreeable to explain their situation to her," Major Hersey protested.

The older man shook his head.

"I have sent for Mrs. Clark, but remember she is living at some distance from here and may not be able to come to us tonight. In a moment it will all be over, James. If you do not know the young woman who says she knows you, you have only to say so briefly. I have an idea, however, that almost any young man might wish to know her. Yet if there is any uncertainty about her story, we must see that she and her companion are made comfortable for the night somewhere and then that she starts for home in the morning. I have an idea from what she confided to me that she must be sent home in any case."

A few moments later, Colonel Winfield re-entered the library with two companions. One of them was a thin, angular woman with a large nose and a highly colored skin. She was wearing a black dress and coat and a black feather boa. The other was a girl of about twenty in an odd costume. A portion of it was an American Red Cross uniform, worn and shabby, a dark

blue coat and cap with the Red Cross insignia. The girl's skirt was of some other dark cloth, yet on her arm she carried a splendid sable coat.

Underneath her cap her cheeks were brilliantly red and her eyes glowing.

"Countess Charlotta!" Major Hersey stammered. "What brings you to Coblenz? You have relatives here whom you are intending to visit?"

The girl turned toward the older American officer.

"There! Major Hersey does remember me and I was so afraid he might have forgotten! We met but once in the Red Cross hospital in Luxemburg where we were both patients at the same time. At least until Mrs. Clark arrives he may persuade you, Colonel Winfield, that I am not a spy or in any way a dangerous character."

Then the girl turned again to Major Jimmie.

"I don't know what Mrs. Clark will say or do when she sees me. She told me positively I was not to embarrass the American Red Cross by taking refuge with them. And I tried my best to be brave and endure my existence. I even gave up to my father's wishes, but I found I could not keep my word. So I confided in Miss Pringle. She is English and was my governess when I was a little girl. She had continued living in Luxemburg after the war began, and yet perhaps because she was English she understood me better than other people. Anyhow we came away together. It was not so difficult to accomplish as you may imagine. Most of the people in Luxemburg at present dislike the Germans as thoroughly as I do. I told a few acquaintances that I was going away because I could not endure being forced into a German marriage. Miss Pringle was with me and I said I was going to join some American friends. Besides, Luxemburg is not very large you know and it does not take long to reach the frontier. If Mrs. Clark is not willing to receive us at the Red Cross Hospital, surely we can find a place to shelter us for awhile. Miss Pringle says she will be glad to go with me to the United States, as she has long wished to travel. I suppose, Colonel Winfield, that you could arrange for us to go to the United States?"

Plainly the young countess's words and manner both amused and annoyed the Colonel.

"Nonsense, young woman, girls who run away from their homes no matter from what motive, must be sent back to their parents. Mrs. Clark will doubtless see that you and Miss Pringle are made comfortable for a few days. But I think I understand how you managed to reach Coblenz and why you were permitted to have an interview with me. The colonel of an American regiment of the army of occupation is not in the habit of having young women whose credentials and passports are not what they should be, take up his spare time. Where, child, had you ever heard my name?"

"Oh, I often heard Mrs. Clark and the American Red Cross nurses speak of you when they referred to their winter at the Red Cross hospital near Château-Thierry. They said too they were delighted that you were to be in Coblenz because they liked you so very much," the Countess Charlotta concluded in the frank fashion which was entirely natural to her.

Nevertheless the colonel looked slightly mollified.

"You will sit down, won't you, and wait until we hear whether Mrs. Clark will be able to join us tonight?"

The Colonel pushed a large leather chair toward the fire, which the little countess dropped into gratefully. Miss Pringle was already seated in a chair which Major Hersey had provided for her during the Countess Charlotta's recital.

"I am sorry, extremely sorry, you were forced to wait so long to see me," Colonel Winfield protested. "It would have been pleasanter if arrangements could have been made for you earlier in the day."

"Oh, you need not worry," the Countess Charlotta returned graciously, "I am not in the least unhappy myself. Getting away from Luxemburg was so much simpler than I ever dreamed it could be, that nothing ahead seems so important. I wrote my father saying that I intended to sail for the United States as soon as it could be arranged. As for sending me back home," the little countess stretched her two hands before the fire so that they grew rose pink from the warmth, then she sighed, but with no deep show of emotion, "it would be very useless and very unkind to send me back to my father after what I have done? Neither my father nor aunt will wish to see me again. Even though they know Miss Pringle has been with me every minute

and that I have done nothing in the least wrong, they would never forgive my disobedience. And they would not wish me to live with them because they should always consider that I had disobeyed them and that I would be an unfortunate influence upon other girls in Luxemburg."

At this instant there was a knock at the door and a few moments later Sonya, Dr. Clark and Bianca entered the large room.

If there was no especial enthusiasm in Sonya's greeting of the Countess Charlotta, still there was no question of their acquaintance and Bianca's welcome revealed all the pleasure which Sonya's lacked.

Nevertheless, Sonya offered to take charge of Miss Pringle and the young countess at the Red Cross hospital for the night until better arrangements could be made. They had several spare rooms in the old castle. It was too late at present for any definite point of view in regard to the unexpected intruders.

CHAPTER XVI

A Growing Friendship

A FEW weeks passed and it was March in Coblenz. The days continued cold and oftentimes dreary, but the American Army of Occupation was growing more accustomed and more reconciled to their new way of life.

Then there were occasional spring days when the winds blew from the south bringing with them scents and fragrances of gentler lands.

At the American Red Cross hospital high up on the hill overlooking the Rhine the conditions were reflected from the army. The Red Cross staff also became more contented and more amenable to discipline than in the early weeks succeeding the close of the war.

There were a good many patients constantly being cared for at the hospital, but they were simply suffering from ordinary illnesses. Only now and then a wounded American prisoner, only partially recovered, would come wandering in from some German hospital in the interior, preferring to be looked after by his own people until he was well enough to be sent back home.

Therefore, although there was sufficient work for the entire corps of physicians, nurses and helpers, there was no undue strain.

However, one member of Dr. Clark's former staff was freed from all Red Cross responsibility. Even before her arrival in Coblenz, Bianca Zoli had showed the effects of the nervous strain of the last months of her war work. Moreover, Sonya had always considered that Bianca was too young and too frail for what she had undertaken and had wished to leave the young girl at school in New York until her own and her husband's return from Europe. But as Bianca had been so determined and as Sonya had dreaded leaving her alone in the United States, she had finally reluctantly consented.

And Bianca had done her full duty. Never once in the terrible months before the close of the war had she flinched or asked to be spared in any possible way. Nor was it by Bianca's own request that she was idle at the present time. It was Sonya who first had noticed the young girl's listlessness, her occasional hours of exhaustion and sometimes of depression. And it was Sonya who had called her husband's attention to Bianca's condition, although afterwards it was Dr. Clark who had ordered that Bianca have a complete rest.

During the first weeks in Coblenz, Bianca had been bored and sometimes a little rebellious over this new state of her existence. She had no friends of her own age in Coblenz, the Red Cross nurses at the hospital were too much engaged with their work and in their leisure with other interests in which Bianca had no share, to give her a great deal either of their time or thought. Sonya naturally wished to be with her husband whenever it was possible, although she never for a moment neglected, or failed to look after Bianca's health and happiness in every fashion she could arrange. But what Bianca really needed was entertainment and friendships near her own age and these under the present circumstances of their life, Sonya was not able to provide.

So far as Bianca was concerned, Carlo Navara had really ceased to count in any measure of importance. He so seldom made the effort to see Bianca and appeared wholly absorbed by his soldier life and such entertainment as he found outside. From his superior officer he had secured permission to take singing lessons from an old music master in Coblenz, and was finding an immense satisfaction and help in this.

But with the coming of the young Countess Charlotta to Coblenz, life assumed a new and far more agreeable aspect for Bianca.

Charlotta had spoken with the wisdom of a knowledge of human nature in announcing that neither her father nor aunt would desire her return to Luxemburg once they learned of her act of rebellion.

Immediately after her unexpected arrival, Sonya Clark had written to the Count Scherin advising him of Charlotta's action, saying that she was entirely well and carefully chaperoned by Miss Pringle. But Sonya also inquired what the Count Scherin's wishes might be concerning his daughter.

In reply she had received a tart letter from the Count stating that in future Charlotta might do what she liked, as it was apparent that she had no idea of doing anything else. In a comparatively short time she would reach the age of twenty-one and would then inherit an estate from her mother, but until then Count Scherin would arrange that Charlotta should receive a modest sum of money each month sufficient for her own expenses and that of her governess. It was true that the elderly man also added that he would be grateful to Mrs. Clark if she consent to become his daughter's friend, although from his own experience he could promise but little appreciation from Charlotta in return.

Upon receipt of this letter Sonya had showed it to the young girl and Charlotta had made no comment. A day or so later, she suggested that she and Miss Pringle remain for a time in Coblenz boarding as near as possible to the American Red Cross if this were in accord with Mrs. Clark's judgment. And since Sonya had no better suggestion to offer at the time, after a few days' stay at the Red Cross hospital, the young Luxemburg Countess and her former governess found a home with a quiet German family, who, impoverished by the war, were glad to receive them.

The house was not half a mile from the hospital, and so far as Bianca was concerned, Sonya was glad the young countess had chosen to stay for a time in their neighborhood under a kind of imposed chaperonage on her part. She had not desired to have Charlotta added to her responsibilities.

But the young girl apparently was anxious to be as little trouble and to incite as little censure as possible after her one act of self-assertion. Sonya could not blame her altogether, although disapproving of Charlotta's method of retaining her freedom.

Moreover, the young countess seemed to possess many of the characteristics which might be a good influence for Bianca, perhaps because of their very contrast. If Charlotta was too frank in her attitude to strangers and her habit of taking them immediately into her confidence, Bianca was altogether too reserved. If the one girl was a little too curious and too much interested in the histories of every human being with whom she came in contact, Bianca was too little interested in them. Moreover, Charlotta, in spite of her occasional moments of depression was naturally

gay and sweet tempered, while Bianca had a little streak of melancholy, sometimes of hidden obstinacy due to her strange childhood. But best of all in its present effect upon Bianca, in Sonya Clark's opinion, was Charlotta's love of the outdoors. Fresh air, exercise and cheerfulness were the only medicines Dr. Clark had considered Bianca required.

Never in her life had Bianca been out of doors as much as was good for her, her childhood in Italy having been spent largely among older people. Moreover, her peasant mother had considered that Bianca must be sheltered and nurtured like a hot-house flower in order to preserve the little girl's shell-like beauty and to make her as little like other children as possible.

Now with Charlotta's companionship she and Bianca spent the greater part of each day outdoors, sometimes accompanied by Miss Pringle, who as an Englishwoman was an indefatigable walker. But now and then the two girls were alone.

This was scarcely a satisfactory arrangement since Coblenz was filled with soldiers and Sonya was by no means content. She could only insist that the two girls be extremely careful and never go any distance by themselves, and also that Charlotta remember that as Bianca was not well, they must never undertake any excursion which would demand too much of Bianca's strength.

At first Sonya was surprised by Charlotta's consideration of the younger girl, it having been reasonable to presume from their brief acquaintance that Charlotta was selfish and self-willed. Yet she seemed really devoted to Bianca and more than willing to sacrifice her own wishes for her friend.

It was one afternoon in the latter part of March soon after luncheon that Miss Pringle, Charlotta and Bianca started out together for an afternoon walk. The day was the warmest day of the early spring and they decided to walk away from the city toward a woods which was probably only about a mile and a half from the neighborhood of the Red Cross hospital.

Nevertheless, it was cold enough for Bianca to be wearing the simple grey squirrel coat which Sonya had presented to her some time before, while Charlotta wore the sable coat which was too handsome for her

present position and needs. But Miss Pringle was attired in her usual shabby black dress and the everlasting black feather boa.

The two girls talked continuously so that Miss Pringle rarely paid any especial attention to what they were saying. She was extremely fond of the Countess Charlotta, but the young girl's enthusiasms sometimes tired her. Moreover, Miss Pringle was honestly fond of the country as only a few persons are and able to amuse herself indefinitely by studying the surrounding scenery.

This afternoon Bianca and Charlotta walked arm in arm along a road leading toward the woods beyond, Miss Pringle walking sedately about a foot behind her two charges.

The road was hard and dry as there was a high March wind, although not at present a cold one.

"Are you sure you will not become tired, Bianca, and the distance is not too much for you?" Charlotta inquired, when they had gone about two-thirds of the way toward the woods.

Smiling, Bianca shook her head.

"Don't be tiresome, Charlotta. I am feeling better since you came to Coblenz than I ever remember before, and not only physically better but so much happier."

Bianca flushed a little since it was difficult for her to make even this revelation of her emotions. It was true, however, that since Charlotta's arrival she had found the girl friend she so greatly needed. Indeed, Charlotta had made her almost forget the little soreness which Carlo Navara's failure to return her friendship had left in her.

A few moments later Charlotta stopped and turned around.

"We are not walking faster than you like, Miss Pringle?" she inquired. Then she added unexpectedly. "Dear Susan Pringle, you are nearly frozen. Why look, Bianca, her lips and cheeks are blue! What on earth made you come for a walk without any warmer clothes? It is that old English

prejudice which makes you think heavy garments are never necessary. You must go back home at once. You are positively shivering."

And it was true that as the two girls and the older woman stood together in a little group for a moment, Miss Pringle could scarcely keep her teeth from chattering.

"I am just a little cold," she confessed, "however, girls, I do not wish to rob you of your walk."

Charlotta smiled back at her serenely.

"Oh, you need not worry, Susan dear! Your returning home for something warmer to wear need not interfere with our plans. We will just walk on slowly toward the woods and when we reach there start back. If you do not overtake us, we will meet you on our way home."

This suggestion was not wholly approved of by Miss Pringle and yet at the moment, being a little frozen mentally as well as physically, she made no serious objection to it.

She believed she could walk home rapidly and be with the two girls again in a short time. Moreover, it was one of her serious weaknesses of character that she seldom objected to any positive wish of the young countess's.

In the brilliant March sunshine the path through the woods appeared like a path of gold. There were no leaves on the tall trees so that the light shone through the bare branches.

"Let us go on just a little further, Charlotta, and then we must go back to meet Miss Pringle," Bianca proposed.

But here the path grew narrow so that Charlotta led the way, Bianca following at first close behind her.

The air was like magic, the old magic of youth, "of love and life and light and laughter."

Charlotta sang along the way.

"Wheresoe'er the Sun
Doth journey in his chariot, I have sought
For that which shall outweigh the love of woman.
On earth, in air, in water, many things
Fair have I found, the seed of song in man,
The seed of flowers in the earth, but over all,
And fairer far and greater, is the seed
Of love. When love hath flown, who shall endure?"

"Queer song for me to sing, isn't it, Bianca?" Charlotta called back over her shoulder. "Yet perhaps after all it is because I intend to try to live always as true as I can to my ideals that I have done what my father and aunt and perhaps Mrs. Clark do not approve. I ought to remember that I am a good deal older than you are in years and far, far older in experience. Yet I do so love the old German lieder, even if they are sentimental."

As Bianca made no reply to this speech continuing on her way, Charlotta began walking faster than she realized.

Until this afternoon she had never felt so thoroughly happy over her freedom from the future which for nearly a year had stretched before her like a dark cloud. Since leaving Luxemburg, although she had not actually regretted her own action, at least she had been harassed with the sense of her father's anger and disappointment.

But today she was happy in forgetting everything save her love of the fresh air, of the blue sky, of the dark rim of hills on the further side of the Rhine, of walking deeper and deeper into the spring woods.

"Don't you think we had better go back, Charlotta?" Bianca called, not once, but several times, and if Charlotta had only been less self-absorbed she must have understood that Bianca's voice each time sounded a little further away and fainter.

But finally, hearing an unexpected sound, Charlotta swung swiftly around.

About half a dozen yards from her, Bianca had fallen and was making no effort to rise.

"Bianca dear, I am so sorry," she cried out at once with the impulsive sweetness characteristic of her. "I am afraid you are tired out and I am a wretch not to have remembered! Mrs. Clark will be angry with me. Come, let me help you up. I wish I could carry you, but at least you can take my arm. Oh dear, what an impossibly selfish person I am! Poor Miss Pringle is probably dreadfully worried to discover what has become of us. I fear my aunt is right when she says I never think of other people until it is too late to be of value to them."

But although Bianca did get up, Charlotta was frightened to discover that every bit of color had disappeared from her face and that she looked utterly worn out.

"I was stupid not to have gone back without you, Charlotta, or not to have made you understand I was too tired to walk so far," Bianca protested, not willing to allow the other girl to bear all of the responsibility. "Besides, it is stupid of me to be so good-for-nothing these days. I wish I had half your energy."

"An energy which does nothing for other people isn't worth much as a possession, Bianca," the older girl returned. "But don't try to talk, and let us walk slowly as you wish. The blame is all mine and I will bear the full burden of it on our return. I am only afraid Mrs. Clark will not encourage our being together again."

At the edge of the woods near the place where they had entered Bianca had to sit down for a little time to rest.

"Wait here and I will run ahead for a short distance. Perhaps I may find Miss Pringle still searching for us, little as I deserve her kindness, or perhaps I can find some kind of vehicle, Bianca. If not I will ask some one who will go back to Coblenz and get a car for us. I really do not think you can manage to walk the rest of the way. Don't be frightened, I won't be long."

Charlotta was not long. A quarter of a mile away, Major James Hersey, who was having his usual afternoon exercise on one of the army horses, heard his name called unexpectedly by a voice which he recognized at once.

The next moment the Countess Charlotta had explained the situation. In a short time Bianca was seated on horseback with her arms about Charlotta while Major Hersey walked beside them into Coblenz. As Bianca did not know how to ride, she preferred that Charlotta should ride in front.

CHAPTER XVII

Faith and Unfaith

WITHIN the next weeks Major Jimmie Hersey found himself much less lonely than during the earlier part of his stay in the occupied city of Coblenz. Of late a pleasant friendship had been developing between the young Countess Charlotta and himself.

After her too lengthy walk, Bianca Zoli had been ill and not able to spend as much time with her new friend as she formerly had.

At first Charlotta had been inconsolable, blaming herself for Bianca's breakdown and refusing to amuse herself in any of her accustomed ways. But with the arrival of spring it became impossible for her to remain indoors, especially as she was only permitted to see Bianca for a few moments each day. It was not that Dr. and Mrs. Clark particularly blamed Charlotta, Bianca being entirely responsible for her own actions. Moreover, Dr. Clark did not believe that any one exhausting experience had been the cause of Bianca's illness but an accumulating number of them, especially her presence in Château-Thierry under such strange conditions during one of the final battles of the war.

Yet it was Bianca's breakdown which was the beginning of a relation approaching friendship between the young United States officer and the Countess Charlotta Scherin.

As Bianca had been in a nearly fainting condition when she was brought finally to the American Red Cross hospital, naturally Major Hersey called there the next day to inquire for her.

By chance, as Charlotta had haunted the hospital all day, she and Miss Pringle were leaving the moment Major Hersey arrived.

As his inquiry occupied only a short time, he was able to overtake the young girl and her chaperon before they had gotten any distance away.

"I don't know what we should have done if you had not been riding horseback yesterday, Major Hersey," Charlotta declared. "I don't believe Bianca could possibly have walked back, or waited very long while we tried to find a vehicle. I'm afraid too that I actually enjoyed my own ride even under such circumstances. You cannot realize how much I have missed riding in these last weeks. I think until my accident, or whatever one may choose to call it, I had been on horseback every day of life from the time I was five years old. I am envious of you. Do you suppose it would be possible for me to get hold of a horse in Coblenz which I could use? Any kind of horse will be better than none."

Ordinarily, Jimmie Hersey was shy, finding it difficult to talk to young women or girls without embarrassment. Yet one could scarcely be shy with the Countess Charlotta, she was so frank and direct herself and so free from any affectation.

"I don't know, I expect it would be hard work to find a woman's riding horse in Coblenz these days. The horses that were any good were requisitioned for the German cavalry. But there is just a chance that I may be able to borrow one of our own American horses for you occasionally. I can't promise of course, but it would be jolly if you could ride with me."

"I should love it," the Countess Charlotta answered.

"But I suppose we ought to have some one else with us; it won't do under the circumstances for us to ride alone," Major Hersey added.

During this speech the young officer colored slightly, since it was not among his usual duties to chaperon a girl. However, he knew what was fitting and intended that the conventions should be obeyed.

Glancing toward him, the little countess was about to demur, insisting that, although of course it might be advisable to have an escort, nevertheless, she did not wish to be deprived of opportunities to ride for such a reason. However, observing Major Jimmie's expression rather surprisingly she remained silent. In spite of his boyish appearance, his

gentle brown eyes and sometimes almost diffident manner, there was a firmness in his mouth and chin which few persons ever misunderstood.

It was during one of their afternoon rides together, about ten days later, when they were accompanied by Sergeant Donald Hackett and Nora Jamison, that unexpectedly Charlotta turned to her escort.

"You don't approve of my having come away from home in the way that I did, do you, Major Hersey? Oh, I know you have never said anything of course, since you do not consider that we know each other sufficiently well to discuss personalities, yet just the same you do disapprove of me."

Jimmie Hersey shook his head.

"Certainly I do not disapprove of you." Then he flushed and laughed. "May I say instead that I approve of you highly. You don't mind my being a little complimentary?"

"Oh, if you mean to be flattering me, you need not think I am not pleased. But what I meant was that you do not approve of my action. Please answer me truthfully. I shall not be offended. After all, you see I am asking you the question, so you cannot be blamed for telling me the truth."

Still the young American officer hesitated.

"Well, Countess Charlotta, you must always remember that I am a soldier, and that in so far as possible I try to live up to a soldier's ideals. One of them is to face the music, never to run away. But there, that seems an extremely impolite thing for me to have said! You know how glad I am personally that you did come to Coblenz."

To the latter part of Major Hersey's remark, Charlotta apparently paid no attention.

She dropped her chin for a moment and stared straight ahead of her.

This afternoon she was wearing a brown corduroy riding habit and brown leather boots and a close fitting corduroy riding hat. Her father had not been so obdurate that he had not sent Charlotta a large trunk of her clothes soon after he learned of her safe arrival in Coblenz.

"You mean to say as kindly as possible that you think I am a coward," she returned finally. "That is what Mrs. Clark thinks also, only she has not said so, I suppose because I have never asked her. Sometimes, I have wondered since my arrival in Coblenz, if I should go back home and ask my father's forgiveness, making him understand that I shall never marry any one for whom I do not care. But my problem is, would he accept an apology which did not include obedience? You see that is what my new American friends cannot understand in my father's and my attitude to each other. Besides, I do so want to go to the United States when Mrs. Clark and Bianca and several of her Red Cross nurses return home. Mrs. Clark tells me that she and Dr. Clark only intend remaining in Coblenz until after the Germans have signed the treaty of peace. Dr. Clark then feels that he must go back to his New York city practice and be relieved by a younger man. Three or four of the American Red Cross nurses will be sailing at the same time. You simply cannot guess how I long to travel. Think of being as restless a person as I am and shut up in a tiny country like Luxemburg! I have never been anywhere else except just into Germany in all my life."

"Hard luck of course, and you would enjoy the United States! You are just the kind of girl to appreciate it. You must do what you think is right yourself since after all another fellow's judgment is not worth much," Major Hersey replied, not altogether pleased with the idea of his new friends vanishing from Coblenz when his own duties might keep him there an indefinite time.

Later that afternoon, at about dusk, on his way toward home, Major James Hersey was considering a number of matters somewhat seriously. He was a United States officer with nothing to live upon save his pay. Up to the present his one desire had been to continue to serve his country.

In Germany at this time there was a good deal of intensely bitter feeling. With the delay in the presentation of the peace terms a less friendly attitude toward America and the Americans was developing than during the weeks first following the German defeat.

In the interior the poorer people were said to be hungry, war weary and anxious to resume their normal business life.

In Coblenz there was especial dissatisfaction with the present German government, Coblenz having been a centre of pan-Germanism and pro-Kaiserism.

Carefully concealed as such ideas were supposed to be from the members of the American Army of Occupation, there were United States officers who appreciated that there were groups of prominent Germans at this time desiring the return of the Kaiser and some form of monarchical control. It was not known in March that the Kaiser might be tried by an international court.

Quietly Major Hersey had been informed that the United States Secret Service was endeavoring to discover the men who had been the Kaiser's closest friends in Coblenz before his inglorious departure into Holland.

There were still, Major Jimmie reflected, many interesting ways to serve one's country, even if the great war were past.

This afternoon it struck him that this might become more of a sacrifice than he had anticipated, but notwithstanding his country must always remain first!

At the threshold of his own door he stopped, slightly puzzled. Some one was already in his sitting-room, which was unusual at this hour. His rooms were cleaned in the morning and he was seldom interrupted afterwards either by a servant or any member of the household.

But probably a fellow officer had dropped in to see him and was awaiting his return.

Suddenly, with this idea in mind, Major Hersey thrust his door open.

Then he stood stock still in a slightly apologetic attitude.

His room was occupied and by the head of the German household in which he was at present living, Colonel Liedermann.

Major Hersey had not come into contact with him but once since his own arrival in Coblenz several months before.

The old German Colonel, wearing civilian clothes, was standing examining an American rifle, which the young American army officer had carelessly left propped up against the wall in one corner of his room.

The older man wheeled sharply at the younger one's entrance.

Colonel Liedermann had the typical German face, broad, with heavy, overhanging brows, small, stern blue eyes, and drooping jaws.

His face reddened at the present moment, but he said courteously: "I owe you an apology for entering your room when you were not present. I came to ask you if you would do me the favor of permitting me to look over some of your American newspapers. Germany is not being informed of all that is taking place in the world these days and I should like very much to know. But it is not for myself alone that I make this request. I am an old man and may not live long enough to see the new Germany if it is ever possible for Germany to arise out of the ashes of the past. But my son, as you know, has never recovered from his last and most serious wound. To lie always in bed after so active a life, grows exceedingly irksome. I find it difficult to keep him even fairly content. It was for him I was asking the loan of your newspapers. I presume the fact that we have so recently been enemies will not preclude your doing me this kindness. If so, I regret my intrusion."

A little overcome by the old German officer's haughty manner and set speech, Major Jimmie only murmured that he would be very glad of course to permit his American newspapers to be read, if Colonel Liedermann and his son did not feel that they would too greatly resent the American point of view.

As he made this statement, although not pleased by the German officer's request, Major Hersey was searching diligently for the latest bundle of American papers which he had received.

As he handed them to the former German Colonel, the old officer said, speaking in a more human fashion,

"I was interested in looking at this American rifle of yours. Naturally as an old soldier I remain interested in firearms, although I shall not live to see another war, however little I believe in a permanent world peace. Clever piece of mechanism! I am told the American rifle is the finest in the world!"

Not feeling called upon to reply to this speech and anxious that the old officer should depart, Major Hersey made no response.

A little later, when he had finally gone, with an unusual expression upon his boyish countenance, Major Jimmie Hersey sank down into his arm chair.

Was it singular that one could not recover from the sensation of acute distrust in the presence of a German? Among them there must be certain individuals who were truthful and straightforward. Yet after a century of training that the end justified the means, among German army officers one could not expect to find any other standard, than the standard which regarded the treaty of Belgium as a "scrap of paper." Betray any friend, any cause, any country to accomplish one's purpose. And tonight, although a member of Colonel Liedermann's household, Major Jimmie Hersey knew he would always remain their foe, no matter with what appearance of courtesy he might be treated.

It was an actual fact that never since his casual conversation with little Gretchen, the baby of the family, had he the same sense of untroubled serenity in the midst of this German military home.

Was it true that Captain Ludwig Liedermann was still unable to move from his bed? If so why had little Gretchen told so ingenious a falsehood? One would scarcely expect a little girl of six to make up so useless a story. But if Captain Liedermann were well why should he continue to make a pretence of illness? There were no penalties attached to the fact that he had been a German officer. Could it be possible that he so intensely disliked the idea of coming into contact with the troops General Pershing had led to victory, that he preferred invalidism to this other form of martyrdom?

There was just one point upon which Major Jimmie Hersey was able to make up his mind during this one evening's meditation.

He would suggest to Miss Jamison that she make no more visits to the Liedermann home. He had been surprised to find her returning not once but several times of late. She must understand that the Red Cross nurses were not supposed to make friends with the families of Germans until after peace was declared.

The little Freia had not been seriously hurt, having entirely recovered from her fright and injury by the next day. Nevertheless, Miss Jamison had made not one, but four or five other calls since her introduction to Frau Liedermann.

Of course, as he knew Miss Jamison but slightly, advice from him might prove embarrassing. She was in reality more Hackett's friend than his, although Sergeant Hackett would deny this fact. He had tried being friendly with Nora Jamison as she attracted him, but she did not seem to care for other interests than her Red Cross nursing and the children who surrounded her like tiny golden bees about a honey pot.

Her ride this afternoon had been her one concession; however, after reaching the Red Cross hospital, she had said it would be impossible for her to ride again, although she had greatly enjoyed it. In the future nursing and other work she had recently undertaken would occupy all her time.

It might be difficult to see Nora Jamison alone in order to warn her against any too great intimacy with the Liedermann family. Yet as a fellow American Major Hersey intended making the effort.

He would watch and if she came again to the Liedermann house, join her on her way back to the American Red Cross hospital.

CHAPTER XVIII

Reconciliation

"I AM so sorry you have been ill, Bianca."

Carlo Navara had come into Bianca's room a few moments before with Mrs. Clark and now Sonya had gone out again leaving them for a few moments alone.

It was a fairly warm spring day and yet there was a little fire in Bianca's room, for the rooms in the old Rhine castle were big and bare and cold, with stone floors.

Bianca wore a little tea-gown of a warm blue woolen material and had a tea table with a tray upon it just in front of her.

She was pouring tea for her guest at the moment he made his last speech.

"Oh, there has been nothing serious the matter with me, Carlo," she returned. "I was simply tired and have been having a delightful rest. I believe when I arrived I said that I should hate to be ill in this dreary old building, but since things so seldom turn out as one expects I have really enjoyed it. Besides, I have promised Sonya that as soon as it is possible I shall go back to the United States and to school. The Red Cross experience in Europe has been a wonderful one, but now, as I am no longer useful here I must take up the duty, I turned my back upon. It is not going to be easy, Carlo, to settle down to a school girl's life after the excitement of war work in Europe. Yet I have the consolation of realizing that I am only going to do what many of our soldiers will do. Lots of the younger men have told me that if their families can afford to send them to college on their return they feel the need of education as they never felt it before coming abroad."

Bianca extended a tea cup to her visitor.

"Is this the way you like your tea, Carlo? Perhaps your taste has changed, but I remember this is the way you liked it in the past."

"But my tastes don't change, Bianca. It is your mistake to believe they do, neither my tastes in tea nor in friends ever alter."

At this Carlo and Bianca both laughed, although with a slight embarrassment.

"I am going back home too, Bee, very soon," the young man added. "This is one of the many things I wanted to tell you this afternoon, besides finding out that you were all right again. I talked things over with Colonel Winfield weeks ago and told him I was getting pretty restless and anxious to return to my work in the United States. I explained to him that a singer can't wait for his career as well as other men, since a voice does not always last a long time. However, I think this argument did not make much of an impression upon the old Colonel, but something or other must have, because he asked for an honorable discharge for me and I'm to go home when it arrives. I think the Colonel's chief reason was that I am not much good as a soldier here in Coblenz. He needs men like Major Hersey and Sergeant Hackett. Hackett is soon to be a first lieutenant, he should have been one long ago."

"I don't see why you have not also been given a commission, Carlo," Bianca replied, a little jealous for her friend.

Carlo laughed.

"I haven't the stuff in me for an officer, Bee. No one knows this better than I do. I am a fair soldier when there is something doing, but a poor one in routine. That is the real test. Don't mind, Bianca, and don't look aggrieved. I have simply tried to do my military duty like millions of other better men, but now I am going back to the thing I am made for. I was only a soldier for the time I felt myself needed.

"By the way I have been learning to sing "Siegfried," Bianca, studying with my old German singing master. He says I sing the music very poorly, but it has been fun trying to learn.

"I know one who lies
Fast in slumber deep
Sleeping age long sleep,
Waiting for thy waking."

Carlo's voice sounded clear and beautiful in the big room.

"If your hair were unbound and you were older you might look like Brunhilde some day, Bianca."

"You are singing better than ever, Carlo, I am so glad!" Bianca murmured, forgetful of herself.

She looked a little paler and more fragile after her illness, yet with her light yellow hair, her delicate features and large dark eyes prettier perhaps than her companion ever remembered seeing her.

"And the dancing, Bee, I gave that up soon after our talk. I did not need it for diversion after I began my music lessons. Besides, Miss Thompson has taught so many of the soldiers folk dancing and some of them are now so good at it that she no longer wishes me for her partner."

Bianca colored.

"I am sorry I told you I did not like Thea Thompson, Carlo. It is foolish to be prejudiced against people, isn't it? She has been extremely kind to me during my illness and both Sonya and I have learned to understand her better. Besides, I was prejudiced perhaps because of you," Bianca ended frankly.

But Carlo made no comment.

Never did it fail to interest him Bianca's strange combination of childishness and womanhood. But today she seemed almost altogether childlike.

At this instant getting up Carlo walked over to the mantel where he put down his tea cup and then stood looking down on Bianca.

"Then we are friends, aren't we, Bee? And I hope we may never misunderstand each other again. I have been worried over your being ill and our not being fond of each other in the old way. You may have to forgive me many things and perhaps I may have other friends in the future of whom you may not approve, but you must not think they will make me forget my loyalty to you."

Bianca was about to reply, but before this was possible Sonya Clark had opened the door and re-entered the room.

She glanced at Carlo Navara with a slight frown and then walked over and laid her hand on Bianca's fair hair.

"Bee is looking better than you expected to find her, isn't she, Carlo, and more like a little girl? I for one am glad her illness has turned her young again. The war in France has made most of us older than we were intended to be, but all the pain and struggle of it was especially hard upon a girl young as Bianca. I am going to take her back to New York as soon as Dr. Clark is able to return and after a year at school I mean to bring her out into New York society as my grown-up daughter. I have always wanted a real one and Bianca will be a lovely substitute. Don't you think she will probably have many admirers, Carlo?"

Carlo looked a little annoyed.

"I thought you had finer ideals for Bianca, Sonya, than to turn her into a society woman!" he answered with a slight change of manner. "But of course she will be charming. She is that already. And no doubt so many people will admire her that she will learn the pleasant art of forgetting her old friends. I shall probably be in New York only a part of each year. Yet somehow, Bianca, I hope you will always remain the Bianca I have known for the past three years. The war has made the time seem ever so much longer."

Again Bianca was about to reply, but Sonya glanced up at a little clock on the mantel.

"I am sorry, Carlo, but Bianca is not allowed to see any one but a half hour at a time. I know she regrets having to say farewell to you, but we are under orders. As for my ideals for Bianca, you need not fear. I mean to do all I can to help make her a gracious and lovely woman. And no one is ever to take Bianca for granted, Carlo, not even you. I think it may be good for her to know that there will be many persons who will think her attractive, as she has too humble an opinion of herself. Besides, every girl has a right to a few years of society and a little admiration. I am sure you agree with me?"

And Carlo was obliged to acquiesce.

Going back to his quarters, after saying goodbye to Bianca, he realized what Sonya's words and manner must have meant.

She considered that he had been too careless of Bianca and perhaps thought her affection something which he could possess or lay aside at his own convenience. But if Carlo were angered at this idea, he also realized that there was a certain truth in Sonya's impression. However, in the future he meant to be more appreciative of Bianca's affection, and kinder to the young girl for whom he felt a brotherly affection.

CHAPTER XIX

A Warning

S OONER than he had hoped Major Hersey had an opportunity for a talk alone with Nora Jamison.

The passing days had wrought no change in his impression that there was something of a suspicious nature taking place in the German household in which he was billeted, a something which was extremely disquieting. Nevertheless, so far he really had no tangible evidence which made it possible for him to go to one of his superior officers. Unless he had some foundation in fact for his suspicion, it would scarcely be fair or just to involve the members of the Liedermann family in unnecessary notoriety and espionage. He must therefore watch and wait until he had discovered some justification for what at present was merely a vague idea.

However, there was nothing to prevent his suggesting to a girl, particularly one who was an American Red Cross nurse, that she try to avoid any appearance of intimacy or even friendliness with a German family, who might later be involved in a serious difficulty with the United States military forces in command of the occupied city of Coblenz.

Three days after reaching this decision, Major James Hersey was leaving the Liedermann house one afternoon just as Nora Jamison was in the act of entering it. Their meeting took place as Major Hersey was about to open the tall iron gate which led into the yard. Indeed he stood aside in order to allow Nora Jamison to enter.

Their acquaintance was a slight one, so that it is possible Nora Jamison may have been surprised to hear the young officer say to her in a hurried and confused fashion.

"Miss Jamison, I must speak to you for a few moments. Will you meet me in an hour under the big linden tree in the park where Freia and

Gretchen tell me you are in the habit of playing with them? I am sorry to trouble you but I have what seems to me an important reason for wishing to talk to you."

In return, after studying the young officer's face for a moment with her large grey eyes, Nora Jamison quietly acquiesced. The next instant she disappeared inside the Liedermann house, the door being opened for her almost instantly by Frau Liedermann herself.

It was possible that the German lady may have observed their brief conversation, yet Jimmie Hersey had no suspicion of Frau Liedermann, who struck him as being an outsider in the family of her husband.

An hour later, when Major Hersey sought the place he had chosen for their appointment, he discovered Nora Jamison was there before him.

She was sitting on a small bench under a great tree filled with tiny flowering blossoms which scented the air with a delicious fragrance.

Evidently she was thinking deeply.

Nora Jamison's exceptional appearance did not attract the young officer, although she did interest and puzzle him.

Her short hair, her slender, almost boyish figure, the queer elfin look in her face, which made one wonder what she was *really* thinking even at the time she was talking in a perfectly natural fashion, had a tantalizing rather than a pleasant effect upon some persons.

Yet once seated beside her Major Jimmie felt less embarrassment than he had anticipated. One had to believe in any human being for whom children cared as they did for this American girl.

"Freia and Gretchen talk about you always," he began a little awkwardly. "I thought at the beginning of our acquaintance that I was to be their favored friend, but soon found you had completely won their allegiance. But where is your usual companion, the little French girl?"

"I left her at the hospital today, Major Hersey; for a special reason I wished to make a call upon Frau Liedermann alone. But please do not let us talk about Freia and Gretchen at present though they are dear little girls.

You have something you specially want to say to me and I must be back at my work at the hospital in another half hour."

Major Hersey was a soldier and Nora's directness pleased him.

"Yes, it is absurd of me to waste your time," he returned. "The fact is simply this. As I am billeted in their house for the present I cannot very well have failed to notice that you are developing what looks like a personal intimacy with the Liedermann family. I presume you know that the Americans in Coblenz, who have anything to do with the United States army, are not supposed to fraternize with the Germans. You may regard it as impertinent of me to recall this fact to your attention. I presume you consider that this advice should come from some one in more direct authority over you, but I assure you I only mean to be friendly. I have no real evidence for my statement, but I am under the impression that certain members of Colonel Liedermann's family are still extremely hostile to their conquerors. Moreover, you yourself realize that as the terms of peace are delayed there is not merely a sense of irritation and discontent with the present German government, but attempts are being made both secretly and openly to overthrow it. I have mentioned my suspicion to no one except you, Miss Jamison, which of course shows my confidence in you, but it has occurred to me as a possibility that Colonel Liedermann, or his invalid son, may be less reconciled to existing conditions in Germany than they prefer to pretend. Later, if a discovery of this character should be made, I would regret to have any one of our American Red Cross nurses drawn into such an uncomfortable situation."

Annoyed with his own confused method of stating a situation, Major Jimmie Hersey paused, coloring in his usual annoying fashion, as if he were a tongue-tied boy.

Yet his companion was looking at him without any suggestion of offense, and rather as if she too were pondering some important matter.

"Thank you for your advice, Major Hersey," she replied the next moment. "Now I am going to ask you to trust me. I have a reason for going to the Liedermann house and I must go there perhaps several times within the next few days. Afterwards I may be able to explain to you my reason. Will you trust me and not report my actions to any one for the present?"

With Nora Jamison's eyes facing his directly, although against his own judgment, there was nothing the young officer felt able to do but agree to her request. Yet it was out of order and it appeared to him that Nora Jamison was being vague and mysterious. It were wiser if she attended strictly to her Red Cross nursing. Surely some one of the other Red Cross nurses had told him that this Miss Jamison was not inclined to be especially intimate with any of them.

That same afternoon after several hours of indoor work, making out a report for his superior officer, Major James Hersey felt that he was rewarded for the day's duties by an afternoon ride with the Countess Charlotta.

As they had no other chaperon for their ride, Miss Susan Pringle had consented to accompany them, rather to Major Jimmie's consternation. He feared that she was taking an incredible risk with her own health and safety in order that her adored young countess should not be disappointed. Yet it was soon evident that the middle-aged English spinster was an accomplished horsewoman.

Along the Rhine that afternoon in the late April sunshine the water shone like rusty gold. High on the opposite hills the old feudal castles looked to Major Jimmie like the castles he had read of in the fairy stories of his childhood. Moreover, it was easy even for a prosaic soldier, such as Major James Hersey considered himself to be, to think of the little Countess Charlotta Scherin as the heroine of almost any romance, even of one's own romance.

CHAPTER XX

Nora Jamison Explains

IT was toward the end of the same week that a note arrived for Major James Hersey from Sonya Clark. She asked him to make an appointment with Colonel Winfield in order that he might see her and one of her Red Cross nurses as soon as possible. Would Major Hersey also try to be present? There was a reason, which he would understand, why his presence might be necessary.

Colonel Winfield and Sonya Clark were great friends, as the colonel had been one of the commanders of a regiment stationed near the Red Cross hospital in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry for many months before the close of the war.

The colonel, however, was not in his library at the moment of Major Hersey's arrival. Sonya Clark and Nora Jamison were there awaiting his appearance.

"We are a few moments early; I suppose the colonel will be here directly," Sonya remarked. "You may not approve of our having come first to the colonel's quarters instead of seeing one of the heads of our secret service," she continued, "but since neither Miss Jamison nor I knew exactly what we should do, we decided to make a report directly to you. Then you will know what should be done. Secrecy seemed to us of first importance."

During Sonya's speech Colonel Winfield had come into his room and now apologized for his delay.

Nora Jamison had never met the distinguished officer before, and therefore looked a little frightened, but a glance at Major Jimmie's interested face reassured her.

After all he was the one person who would substantiate the story she had to tell, for even if he had no positive evidence at least his suspicions would coincide with her knowledge.

"You are sure there is no one who may overhear us, Colonel Winfield?" she asked a little timidly. "I think when I tell you what I am about to that you will understand why one still has reason to suspect almost any one in Germany, although the good of course must suffer with the evil."

Colonel Winfield nodded.

"I understood from Mrs. Clark that you wished to talk to me on a private matter and I have one of my orderlies stationed at the door. There is no chance of being overheard. As for continuing to feel suspicion of the enemy, while the American army is policing the Rhine it is our business to take every precaution against treachery. At present I wish I could be more certain that the state of mind among the inhabitants of Coblenz is what it appears upon the surface. Tell me what information you have and how you have acquired it. There is a possibility that I may not be so much in the dark as you at present suspect, Miss Jamison."

"If you don't mind, may I take off my hat while I talk?" Nora Jamison asked. "It is boyish of me, I suspect, but I can talk better with my hat off. Do you happen to know, Colonel Winfield, that there are persons in Germany who are friendly to the Kaiser in spite of all that he has made them endure? Actually they do not seem to realize that he is chiefly responsible for the tragedy of their country and her present position as an outcast among the nations."

"Yes, I quite understand that fact," Colonel Winfield returned drily.

"Then do you also know, Colonel, that there are men and women in Germany today who are anxious to rescue the Kaiser from his fate. They would make any possible sacrifice to save him from being tried by an international court in case the Allies decide upon this course. But perhaps I had best tell my story from the beginning and you must forgive me if some of it appears confused."

At this instant, clasping her hands together in her lap, Nora Jamison sat staring straight ahead, but looking at nothing in the room, rather at some

mental picture.

"When I came to Europe I hoped to be of service as a Red Cross nurse, but by the time I arrived the war was over and the armistice about to be signed. Still I hoped I had not come altogether in vain and persuaded Dr. Clark to bring me with him as a member of his Red Cross staff who were to serve with the American Army of Occupation in Coblenz.

"I felt a good deal of bitterness in coming into Germany. The young man to whom I was engaged was killed by the Germans near Château-Thierry. I know it was wrong and yet I felt as if I would like to revenge myself upon them for all I have suffered. I must apologize for telling you this, but you will see that it does bear upon my story.

"Well, after I came to Germany, although I discovered that I did dislike and distrust the German people, yet I could not make up my mind not to feel affection for the little German kinder, who after all were in no way responsible for the war. I always nursed children before I joined the Red Cross and have a special fondness for them. The little French Louisa and I, who are always together except when I am at work, made friends with a number of the German children. Among them were two little girls, whom Major Hersey will tell you are especially attractive. But if I seemed to single out these two children and especially the older one, Freia, it was not because she so greatly attracted me. Early in our acquaintance the little girl told me an anecdote which struck me as extraordinary and almost immediately aroused my suspicion. Please don't think I found out at once what I am trying to tell you, I at first had to piece things together.

"Freia told me that her brother, Captain Ludwig Liedermann, who had been wounded, had recovered, but would not leave his room and did not wish any one to know he was well. Freia received the impression that he did not wish to be seen by any of the American officers or soldiers in Coblenz. He once told little Freia that he hated to meet the men who had defeated their Emperor and driven him into exile."

The Colonel nodded.

"Yes, well, that strikes me as if alone it might be a sufficient reason. I would not be surprised if there were other German officers and soldiers

hiding from us with this same excuse. However, we shall remain on duty in Germany until both the military and the civilians find it wiser not to seek cover in order to escape the consequences of their past."

"Yes, I know, but this did not seem to me all there was in Freia's story," Nora continued. "So I confess I made friends with the little girl largely in order to gain her further confidence. She afterwards told me other things that were puzzling. I knew that the Germans in Coblenz were not allowed to hold secret meetings, but Freia insisted that officers who had been old friends of her brother's came constantly to their house and that her sister Hedwig opened a side door for them, so they would not disturb Major Hersey. Then they talked together a long time and no one else was allowed to enter her brother's room, save her father. She also spoke of her sister Hedwig's hatred of the Americans. It seems that Fraulein Liedermann and I have at least one experience in common. The German captain to whom she was engaged was also killed in the war. Hedwig was angry because her little German half-sisters were willing to make friends with Major Hersey and me. But I must not take so long to come to my point. I also made friends with Frau Liedermann. Often I went to her house, although always I was afraid that the fact would be reported. If I was found to be fraternizing with the Germans I would have been forced to end my acquaintance with the Liedermanns, as you know.

"I can't tell you near all the details, but the important fact I discovered is this: Captain Liedermann, the colonel his father, and a number of other German officers have for weeks been making a secret effort to have the Kaiser spirited away from Holland. Their plan is to conceal him in some spot where the Allies will be unable to discover him. Then, when the resentment against him dies down the Kaiser will be rescued and brought back to Germany. Captain Liedermann has been trying for a long time to get out of Coblenz. But I cannot tell you anything more than this bare outline of the German plan."

Breathless and shaking a little from fatigue and excitement, Nora Jamison now paused.

"You mean to tell me that you have made this extraordinary discovery during your occasional visits to the Liedermann home, when I who have

been billeted there for months have learned nothing?" Major Hersey demanded, coloring in his habitual fashion, but this time partly from admiration of the girl beside him and partly from annoyance with himself.

"Yes, but our positions have been entirely different, Major Hersey," Nora explained. "Every precaution was taken to see that you found out nothing. Indeed you were apparently welcomed into the Liedermann household so that your presence there might be a blind. What I found out was owing to my intimacy with the two little girls and later with Frau Liedermann. I hope for her sake it may never be discovered just how much she did confide to me. I sometimes think she almost wanted me to report what I knew, she is so weary of war and intrigue and deception, and is almost as much of a child as her two little girls. I think this is all I have to tell at present. If our Intelligence Department should wish to ask me questions later, why I may be able to answer them."

Colonel Winfield rose and walked over to Nora.

"You have given me extraordinarily valuable information, Miss Jamison. I shall see that it reaches the War Department at once. I have always insisted that women make the best members of the secret service. But under the circumstances I feel that I have the right to tell you this. We did know something of this plot you have just unveiled. What we did not know was where to find the centre of the conspiracy in Coblenz. I think you need have no uneasiness, the Kaiser will never be saved from the consequences of his acts while the allied armies are policing the Rhine. However, Miss Jamison I am glad to have had you in Coblenz and think you have justified your coming to Germany. May I congratulate a Red Cross girl for another variety of service to her country. Now you are tired, shall I not send you back to the hospital in my car?"

But Sonya Clark shook her head.

"No, thank you, Colonel Winfield. Dr. Clark is to have one of the Red Cross automobiles come for us, which is probably now waiting around the corner. We wished our visit to you to be known to as few persons as possible. Major Hersey will see us to the car. Goodby."

CHAPTER XXI

The Rainbow Bridge

ONE afternoon in May, Sonya Clark was entertaining a number of friends among the American officers and soldiers in Coblenz in the garden back of the American Red Cross hospital.

During the early spring the Red Cross girls had devoted many leisure hours to digging and planting flower seed on the level space just behind the old building and overlooking the banks of the Rhine.

This afternoon this spot was gay with spring flowers, also there were old rose vines climbing high on the grey stone walls, now a delicate green but promising a rich bloom in June.

These were troubled days in Germany, the most troubled since the arrival of the American Army of Occupation. A short time before the allied peace terms had been presented to the German delegates in Versailles; since then all Germany had been crying aloud protests against a just retribution. Germany was in official mourning.

Yet the Americans in Coblenz, soldiers and civilians alike, were undisturbed, knowing Germany would sign the terms when the final moment arrived.

Today something of greater importance was taking place among Sonya Clark's and Dr. David Clark's friends. This little reception was their farewell. In a short time they were returning to New York taking with them a number of their staff of Red Cross nurses. Several days before a new unit of Red Cross workers had arrived in Coblenz, relieving former members who desired to return home.

The afternoon was a lovely one, now and then occasional light clouds showed in the sky, but away off on the opposite bank of the Rhine there

were lines of blue hills, then purple, fading at last to a dim grey.

Sonya and Dr. Clark were standing among a little group of friends. Nona Davis and Mildred Thornton were beside them. Both of the original Red Cross girls were wearing decorations which they had lately received from the French government and the United States government in recognition of their four years of war nursing among the allied armies of Europe.

They were leaving with Sonya and Dr. Clark for the United States and were expecting to be married soon after their arrival. Colonel Winfield, who was an old friend, was congratulating them and at the same time lamenting their departure from Coblenz.

"I wonder if you will tell me just what members of Dr. Clark's staff are going with him?" he inquired. "I fear I shall feel a stranger and an outsider at the American Red Cross hospital when so many of you sail for home who were with me in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry, caring for our wounded American boys. May your married life be as happy as you deserve."

Slipping one hand through the elderly Colonel's arm, Nona Davis suggested to him and to Mildred Thornton:

"Suppose we take a little walk; no one is noticing us with Sonya and Dr. Clark the centre of attention. Whatever I may dislike about Germany, I shall never forget the fascination of many of the views along the Rhine during this winter and spring in Coblenz.

"As for the members of Dr. Clark's staff who are going home with him, there are no nurses who will not remain except a Miss Thompson. Bianca Zoli, Mrs. Clark's ward, is leaving with her of course. Then I suppose you know that the little Luxemburg Countess Charlotta Scherin and her governess are to accompany us, I believe with the consent of her father."

As the little group moved away in the direction of the river bank, Mildred smiled.

"See, Colonel, there are the three girls we have been discussing! The little Countess Charlotta and your pet officer, Major Hersey, are probably saying farewell. Further on is Theodosia Thompson and Dr. Hugh

Raymond. Dr. Raymond is to be in charge of our American Red Cross hospital in Coblenz after Dr. Clark's departure. It is a good deal of responsibility for so young a physician, but Dr. Clark seems to think he is equal to it. And there perched up in the branches of that old tree is Bianca Zoli. How pretty she looks in her delicate blue dress against such a background!"

"And who is that romantic young soldier standing beneath her?" the Colonel demanded.

"Oh, yes, I remember now, he is the soldier-singer, who I believe is also going back to the States, as I secured an honorable discharge for him a short time ago. Odd name his for an American, what is it?"

"Carlo Navara," Nona replied, "and an old friend of ours."

Then they continued on their walk.

At the same moment Theodosia Thompson and Dr. Raymond were slipping out of sight of the guests along a little path which ended in a group of shrubs a few yards down the hill.

"I can't see why you wish to renew what we were discussing a few days ago, Dr. Raymond," Thea argued a little plaintively, her red hair shining in the warm light, her pale cheeks showing two spots of bright color. "I think I said to you then all I could say. I do appreciate the honor of your believing that you care for me, although I think you will soon find out your mistake. You will see then as plainly as I do now that we are not suited to each other. I told you I did not wish to marry any one. I know it seems ridiculous and perhaps wicked to you that I should prefer to learn folk dancing as a profession rather than to continue as a nurse. But people cannot always understand each other's dreams and desires and I only undertook the Red Cross nursing because I wanted to help nurse our soldiers, not because I wanted to be a nurse always. But Ruth Carroll believes as you do and never intends giving up her work, not unless she marries which I hope she may some day. She is so splendid and restful, just the kind of girl I should think an ambitious man would care for. She would be such a pillar of strength. Alas, that I shall never be to any one, not even to myself I am afraid!" Thea ended. Then she put out her hand.

"Don't let us argue on this lovely day, Dr. Raymond, just shake hands with me, and let us wish each other good luck."

Under the circumstances, since there was nothing else to do and also because he was partly convinced of the truth of Thea's speech, Dr. Raymond agreed with her request. A few moments later, climbing up the hill, they rejoined the other guests.

From the ground, smiling up at her in a teasing fashion usual in their relation to each other, Carlo at the same time was saying to Bianca Zoli:

"Sure you are not especially glad to be going home, Bianca, chiefly because I am so soon to follow you? I've an idea you would be very unhappy if we were parting for any length of time. Nicht war?"

Bianca shook her head, smiling and at the same time frowning.

"Under those circumstances, I should simply have tried to bear my departure bravely, Carlo, as one who has been through a good many experiences as a Red Cross girl in time of war. But don't speak German even in fun. Some day I may learn to dislike the language less, but not at present. Moreover, I do not look forward to seeing a great deal of Mr. Carlo Navara even if we are both again to be in the United States. You will be very busy with your career and will probably soon be a more famous person than you were before you entered the United States army, while I, well I shall work hard in my way, although I shall continue to remain an obscure person."

"I don't know, Bianca, suppose some day you condescended to marry me. Wouldn't you like to share my fame?"

Bianca shook her head.

"I think not, Carlo. Besides, you must not say things of that kind to me. You know Sonya would be angry."

Carlo looked a little annoyed, then laughed.

Since her illness it seemed to him that Bianca had changed in some subtle fashion. One was no longer so sure of getting the best of her in an argument.

Besides, after all, would it be so unpleasant to share one's future with Bianca? She looked oddly pretty and ethereal high up in the branches of the tree where he had lifted her a few moments before.

But at this moment there could be no further discussion between them, a message arriving from Sonya saying that she wished Bianca to come and assist her in pouring tea.

After he helped her down to the ground, Carlo made Bianca pause for a moment while he pointed across the river.

"See that curious effect, Bianca! There is a rainbow over the Rhine. It comes sometimes in the late afternoon light even when there has been no storm. Let us hope the world will find peace at the end of the rainbow, and more especially Germany. I won't come with you now, as I hate having to serve tea. Ask some of your soldier friends who are cleverer at it than I. I want to watch the sunset on the Rhine."

And Carlo and Bianca parted for a short time, yet thereafter many experiences and a number of years were to roll between them before Carlo and Bianca at last found happiness in each other.

At the same time Major Hersey and Charlotta were observing the curious effect of light over the river.

They had gone together to the edge of one of the cliffs and were gazing across at the great fortress of Ehrenbreitstein from whose tower the stars and stripes were floating. To them the rainbow seemed to dip down into the depth of this ancient fortress and lose itself in the shadows.

"Whenever I am homesick to return to my own country, Countess Charlotta, I simply stare across at the flag on that old German fortress and think what it represents," Major Hersey declared. "Then I am content to remain in Germany for as long as I am needed. A little thing, isn't it, to give a few months, or a few years, or whatever length of time may be necessary to teach Germany her lesson, when so many other men have given their lives that our flag be the flag of victory and a just peace!"

The young girl's face softened.

"I think you are a good soldier, Major Hersey. There is something I want to confide to you. I did write my father as you suggested and told him I would come home if he wished, only he must allow me to keep my freedom. His answer was what I expected. He does not desire to see me at present and says I am free to travel in the United States if I like. Only he adds that when I have seen more of the world perhaps I shall be more content to do my duty to my father. Not very clear, but I think I understand. My father really wishes to become reconciled with me, only not to seem to give in too readily. So I shall return home in a few months perhaps. Then if you are still in Coblenz and I write you, won't you come to Luxemburg? We have been such good friends and I hate saying goodbye forever to people I like."

Major Jimmie Hersey shook his head, his brown eyes were steady and although the old boyish color had diffused his face, there was the firm line about his mouth and chin which his soldiers knew and respected.

"No, Countess Charlotta, I shall not come to see you in Luxemburg or elsewhere and this must be our goodbye. I have no idea of leaving the United States army so long as I am allowed to remain in it. This means I will have nothing to offer you in the future, save what I have now, I believe you understand."

The Countess Charlotta nodded.

"Yes, I understand. Goodby, yet nevertheless I shall look forward to our meeting again."

Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious punctuation errors were corrected.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.



*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RED CROSS
GIRLS WITH PERSHING TO VICTORY ***

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